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THE IMPACT OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR AND THE DEFEAT
OF GERMANY ON FRIEDRICH THIMME

by



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A THESIS

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled THE IMPACT OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR AND THE DEFEAT OF GERMANY ON FRIEDRICH THIMME, submitted by Rolf L. Grass in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

ABSTRACT

For most Germans, the end of World War I came suddenly and unexpectedly. There had been no warning of an impending military defeat and the vast majority of the population were left with the belief, in the summer and fall of 1918, that somehow the conflict would resolve itself favourably to the German cause. Thus the "suddenness" of the armistice in November, produced a traumatic effect on a nation, which had been conditioned towards victory.

Among those who were unprepared for the sudden demise of the Kaiserreich, was Friedrich Thimme. An upper echelon public servant and renowned historian, with a vast insight into Germany's political structure and military potentialities during the war, he was nevertheless surprised by the events of November 1918. Why this should be thus, is one of the problems surrounding not only Friedrich Thimme, but the vast majority of his generation and his social caste. Why did the end of the war catch them unawares, and why could they not accept defeat? Thimme, by virtue of being a loyal monarchist, a civil servant and historian, lends himself admirably as a spokesman for his generation, and for the upper bourgeoisie of the Wilhelmine and Weimar periods. Within his post-war experiences, may lie a partial explanation as to why there was such an easy and ready acceptance of the many myths which surrounded the war, the defeat and subsequently "Versailles". His own work after 1918, led Thimme to investigate the associated problems of the war and Germany's defeat. After the "Treaty" however, these became mere adjuncts to the larger problem of repudiating the "lie" of Article 231. It was this "guilt"

clause which to a large degree occupied the center stage of Weimar's historical research, and Thimme was in the forefront of the investigation.

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CHAPTER I
THE YOUNG THIMME

. . . mit einem guten Doktor in Geschichte und Nationalökonomie versehen, könnte es mir kaum fehlen, eine Stellung an der Presse zu bekommen.

(Friedrich Thimme to his
father 8 July 1888)

Friedrich Thimme, the second of eleven children was born in Krimderode a. Harz. February 12, 1868.¹ The father, Gottfried Thimme was a Luthern country parson, and as a consequence the family found itself stationed for most of Friedrich's early life in fairly small rural communities of central and northern Germany. The pastoral and rural background dominated the early years of the children and any urban contacts had to wait until the continuance of their education, necessitated that they attend one of the larger cities or towns. The parental manor served as the focal point both from an educational and social viewpoint. Until they reached the age of fifteen the children were instructed by their father and judging by the results the process must have been a very thorough one indeed, because none of the Thimme siblings experienced difficulties at any of the institutions they later attended. This educational experience was not without its drawbacks however; a stern authoritarian father who coupled his schooling with large and liberal dosages of biblical instructions, designed to serve as guideposts for his children, often made the atmosphere somewhat stifling and less than ideal for unfettered behaviour. This did not preclude parental love or normal childhood pleasures, but it narrowly circumscribed the behaviour pattern and contacts of the children. Being Pastorenkinder also meant that intermingling with the

village children was kept to a minimum because of economic and social differences; with the result that the Thimme children grew up in an environment which precluded outside contacts and which by design, was totally family oriented and introspective. This early inward manifestation was to come to the fore in later years when Friedrich Thimme developed a very strong clan consciousness about his family despite the fact that he was often at odds with some of them. The diversions that did exist were largely concentrated on the home and its accompanying surroundings. Friedrich Thimme's father, as a result of economic necessity rather than choice engaged in some agriculture, to supplement the meagre income of a country parson, and to feed his growing family. In this endeavour the children proved to be a ready and willing pool of labour; a task which at the same time brought some variety into their daily regimentation.²

Early in Friedrich Thimme's life it became evident that he suffered from a severe hearing affliction which gradually deteriorated throughout his life. Initially however, this was viewed as little more than a nuisance by Friedrich himself and was not even recognized by his father as a malady. Instead Thimme senior referred to his eldest son as being somewhat begriffstutzig (slow) when the lad was three years old, and saw it as a lack of mental prowess rather than a medical ailment. The first and most obvious cure for such unexplainable retardation was a liberal dose of the ubiquitous "cane" in the hope that this would clear up the "disobedience". Gradually the father became aware that Friedrich's case was not the result of any unwillingness on the boy's part to apply himself to the tasks at hand. Once he had taken cognizance of the situation Gottfried Thimme did

everything within his limited means and circumstances to provide the boy with the best medical help available. Friedrich now found himself being sent to various Spas in the hope that some cure would be forthcoming, as well as partaking in an eight week course for the deaf to learn lip-reading, an endeavour which his father continued to practice with him after the completion of the course. There is little evidence to indicate that the Spas did any good or harm; whereas the lip-reading course at least prepared him for his adult life. The latter attempt was obviously extremely successful, because Friedrich Thimme had little or no difficulty in adulthood partaking in conversations, as long as he could see those with whom he was conversing. Often his conversational partners were not even aware of his handicap and attributed his keen attention to their facial expressions to some peculiar mannerism of Thimme. The success of the therapy now made it possible for Friedrich and his father to seriously consider him for a scholastic career, since this would be one of the few opportunities open to him, where his handicap would not be of primary importance, and which offered at least some chance of financial stability.³ While living at home the problems associated with his deafness were not acute, because he could rely on his younger brother Karl for assistance, since only fifteen months separated the two in age. Furthermore, his status as the oldest son guaranteed him some pre-eminence in the household, if only in the eyes of those younger than him, and thus he could take temporary refuge in the fact that for the time being he was a contributing member of the family. Nevertheless he became somewhat of a recluse even within the already restricted surroundings of the parental manor, and the despondancy increased as the time drew nearer when he would have to

face the outside world. Certainly his father's well-meant yet inopportune advice, "Welche der Herr liebhat, den züchtigt er", on the occasion of Friedrich's confirmation was not received by the latter in the spirit that it was intended. Instead the boy turned increasingly against the faith of his father, because he viewed his own handicap not as a blessing in disguise, but rather as an unjust blow struck against him by some higher power.⁴

Despite the economic difficulties of supporting a large family on an inadequate income, Gottfried Thimme made provisions to send seven of his sons and two of his daughters to various Gymnasiums and Universities. In this he was helped by the scholarships which all of the children received from one source or another; yet this monetary dependency also entailed peculiar problems for the children. They had to follow a very strict fiscal regime and were accountable for all their expenses to their father at the end of each week while they were away from home. Secondly, they were expected to pay back whatever monies their father put towards their education, a not unusual request, except that it further increased their dependency on the home while they were mortgaging their future. The scholarships of course, also made it imperative that the children should be scholastically successful so as not to forfeit them. This again resulted in close parental control over their behaviour and studies, a fact they often resented and later this led to a certain ambivalence on Friedrich's part towards authority of any sort. The economic tightrope that they were continually expected to walk eventually produced a backlash in Friedrich so that in later years, despite a comfortable income he often found himself in economic straits because of a certain frivolity towards the management

of his resources.⁵

After his confirmation in 1883, Friedrich visited the Real-Gymnasium in Nienburg, where his two year stay proved to be scholastically successful, largely because of the thorough training he had received from the hands of his father. Thereafter he transferred to the Gymnasium in Verden and though initially troubled by his deficiencies in Greek and Latin, he soon overcame these by diligent application and rose near to the top of his class. After graduation the obvious problem was to select a suitable career wherein his handicap would prove to be minimal yet one which would combine an intellectual challenge with financial rewards. An ideal choice appeared to be a librarian or archival career and it was for this reason that he enrolled in the study of history at the University of Göttingen in 1887. Initially he found himself at a severe disadvantage because of his inability to follow the lectures. The problem had been apparent already in the Gymnasium, but because of smaller class sizes and closer teacher - pupil contact the disadvantage had not been as apparent.⁶ Again however, the handicap was mitigated somewhat by the fact that Karl was also in attendance at Göttingen and often their schedules and courses would overlap so that Friedrich could enjoy the benefit of his brother's faculties. As he became acquainted with the system and with his professors, and as they became aware of his affliction, the problems were minimized and Friedrich to all extents and purposes became just another student indulging in the usual past-times and capers. He quickly joined the Historical Club in Göttingen where he had been accepted despite his fears that his Schwerhörigkeit would preclude him from a society whose interests centered on debate and elocution. Following his father's footsteps he

also took up fencing, a must for any aspiring academic, and a sport in which he could hope to emulate his father. The latter had been fencing champion at his Alma Mater and there was little reason why the son should not do the same. It was with regards to this sport that the ambivalence in the relationship between Friedrich and his father once again manifested itself. Thimme senior, on principle was against any type of frivolous behaviour whether this manifested itself in sports or other diversions, cautioning his children to spend their time more fruitfully in prayer or study. Yet on the problem of fencing he gave Friedrich full rein, at the same time taking pains to hide this fact from his wife. On the problem of drinking, this same duality of approach manifested itself in the father's advice to his son. Since Friedrich was required to present detailed financial statements at the end of each week, justifying his expenses, he saw little profit in hiding from his father the fact that he drank beer with the members of the various organizations he belonged to. Again, his father condoned this though it was obviously not in keeping with the "Christian spirit" he had tried to instill in his children.⁷ Friedrich at one time even sought professional medical advice to assure his parents that beer drinking was not damaging to his hearing.⁸ At the same time the son took pains to minimize his social life in the letters to his father, leaving the latter with the impression that his eldest son was diligently applying himself to his studies with few outside distractions. The letters notwithstanding, evidence from his contemporaries and the reminiscences of his brothers would indicate that Friedrich was indeed far more outgoing and socially oriented than he would have his parents believe.⁹ On the whole, it may be assumed that his first semesters at

Göttingen did not solely consist of hard work and that his experiences were far happier than he cared to admit to himself or to his father. The explanation for the dichotomy may be, that it was to Friedrich's advantage to play the role of the underprivileged, handicapped student to his father, partly to elicit sympathy, and partly to "repay" him for the earlier mental anguish Friedrich had suffered at the hands of an overbearing father who had failed to recognize his son's difficulties.

After several semesters at Göttingen Friedrich felt that it would be advantageous to him if he could pursue his studies at Berlin. Since he still had a some type of journalistic career in mind, Berlin's University and its orientation towards more recent historical and political problems, appeared to be an obvious and logical choice. His father on the other hand, felt that Friedrich would not be getting the individual attention in the Capital that he received in Göttingen and that consequently his studies would suffer. He therefore vetoed the idea, much to Friedrich's disappointment.¹⁰ In retrospect one may now question the wisdom of Gottfried Thimme's decision, in view of the problems Friedrich was to encounter at Göttingen within the next few years. Yet in 1888 it initially appeared as if he had made a wise decision. Shortly after being turned down by his father, Friedrich was being encouraged by his Professors to compete for a monetary prize, which was being offered to the best paper of any student, writing on the occupation of Hannover during the French occupation 1809-1813. Since the paper would also have to include economic, constitutional and other aspects of the period, Friedrich felt himself competent enough to investigate the problem though he knew that the competition from other students at other universities would be formidable. It was as a

result of this competition, and the necessity to delve into local historical problems that his first familiarity with the discipline occurred as well as his knowledge and expertise of Germany during the period of the "Wars of Liberation". Though he loathed the restrictions local history placed upon him, being more interested in the larger problems of nation building, the experience obviously did nothing to dampen his enthusiasm for the subject, for he subsequently won first prize. Thus, in a roundabout manner he entered the discipline around which his future was to revolve.¹¹

In the summer of 1892, he took his doctoral examination and as could be expected after his considerable efforts in the preceeding years he passed, "magna cum laude". His expectations were high that he could now enter upon an archival career, having moved away from journalism after his success as a historian. Despite the fact that he had proven himself to be a diligent researcher and a first class historian he was denied entry into his chosen field. It was a bitter blow for the young scholar who had set his whole future and existence on precisely this type of occupation and who had felt himself to be eminently qualified for it. In this estimation he was not alone, having received the support of his Professors who attempted to foster his cause in monarchical circles, but to no avail. A parallel application for a librarianship also failed to materialize, and Friedrich was rightfully despondent in the face of such opposition. His disappointment was compounded by the fact that he had been virtually assured of a post while still studying because of his proven capacities.¹² Out of economic necessity rather than choice Friedrich decided to accept a Stipendium zur Habilitation in the fall of 1893 which would at least

provide him with a meagre income, allowing him at the same time to continue his studies in the hope that something would turn up at some future date.¹³

In his private life at least some improvement was to take place. In September of 1894, he became engaged to Lieschen Müller. It was obvious at once that her feminine nature had wrought some changes upon Friedrich's character, providing him with a somewhat more positive attitude towards life, as well as reawakening his instincts for life's little pleasures which he had by his own admission neglected too long in the cause of scholarly devotion. Again however, his new-found ardour was dampened by the fact that he failed to pass his Dozentenexam, after he had been assured that it would be a mere formality.¹⁴ The blow was ascerbated by the fact that two of the professors who had been closest to him and who had been his guiding spirits throughout, had died shortly before the exam, thus leaving Friedrich at the mercies of one, who did not view him with the same charitable attitude. Ostensibly too he felt himself tricked, because he had been encouraged by the faculty in the belief that the exam would be nothing more than a passage. Friedrich now had a doctorate, but was prevented from reaching professorial rank because he lacked the pre-requisite Habilitation, and without it could not teach at a German University.¹⁵ The insidious manner in which this injustice was perpetrated upon him, was to rankle him for the rest of his life. Partly his prodigious work tempo, and the numerous articles and publications which flowed from his pen, can probably be traced to the early rancour he felt towards the academic community, which had denied him entry into its ranks. Through the sheer volume of his output he assuaged his own feelings, and ably demon-

strated that he was at least as good, if not better than "them".

Nevertheless the future in the summer of 1895 looked bleak and the outlook was not brightened when even a direct appeal to the Kaiser on behalf of Friedrich failed, though it was supported by personalities close to the throne.¹⁶ * In order to alleviate his immediate financial straits, Friedrich considered once again on entering a journalistic career, "Als ultimum refugium bleibt mir die Presse".¹⁷ Though he knew that it would be a hindrance to any future academic success, it would at least provide him with an acceptable livelihood. For a time he wrote articles on the internal developments of Hannover, especially the "Welfen" problem and since he had established himself as something of an authority on the topic in his student days and with his consequent work towards his habilitation, he found a ready market for his endeavours. During this time he also completed a two volume work on the history of Hannover, examining the conditions which had existed during the French occupation. The work was a direct result of the Preisau-schreiben, and part of it had been incorporated into his doctoral thesis.

In the spring of 1897 the uncertainty came to a sudden and happy conclusion for Friedrich Thimme. He had been selected to write the definitive history of the Kingdom of Hannover, and to facilitate this undertaking, the Hannoverian Landtag had awarded him the sum of 1500 Marks annually which was augmented by an identical largesse from

* Aside from his former Professors, the Hofprediger (court chaplain) General Superintendent Faber and Herr von Lucanus, Chef of the Civil Cabinet, interceded on his behalf. Friedrich's own father wrote a very warm and moving letter to the emperor, but the whole scheme came to naught.

the Ministry of Cultural Affairs. Since the work was expected to take at least five years, Thimme could now for the first time make some plans for the future, having achieved at least some economic stability. On the strength of expected sales the publishers also advanced him some monies, and so for the moment his future seemed assured.¹⁸

Friedrich Thimme was now twenty-nine years old, and while not a failure, he had not yet reached any pinnacle in his career or had even begun to be secure in any kind of professional capacity. To a degree he blamed his failures on his deafness, and the assumed prejudices that this made him subject to.¹⁹ Because of his deafness he had by his own admission become a virtual Autodiktat, who by virtue of circumstance relied solely upon himself, pursuing his research and writing without outside assistance, a task he often found lonesome, yet suitable to his character. As with Treitschke, the knowledge of his handicap "... bildete den tragenden Untergrund seiner geistigen Existenz."²⁰ In his later life he often set himself a high standard and a furious pace at which he claimed to be comfortable; yet it could also be argued that this was a refuge from himself and though he worked arduously and often to the point of exhaustion it held little pleasure for him.

At the end of May 1898, Thimme and Lieschen Müller were married. Within a year their first child, a daughter was born, and the marital bliss which now settled over the family to some degree removed the shadows of uncertainty that still beclouded his future.

During the next few years Thimme kept himself occupied and solvent by pursuing the commissioned work on the history of the Kingdom of Hannover and by writing articles on the "Welfen" problem as well as

indulging in intellectual bantering with other academics on related topics. His name and proficiency gradually became a by-word in Hannoverian historical circles, which eventually led to an assistant librarianship at the Hannover city library in 1902; providing financial security though not affluence.²¹ At the precise moment when most would have been able to look ahead and at least discern some stability, Thimme suffered the bereavement of his wife in the latter part of 1902.²² After four short years of happiness, for perhaps the first time in his life; he was once again alone except for their child. The blow was doubly hard: Lieschen had been more than a companion, she had served as his interpreter for, and towards others, and she had generally lightened the burden which deafness had placed upon him.

In order to combat his loneliness, he now steeped himself in his work even more than he had done previously, using it both as an escape from his personal problems and as an outlet for his undivided energies. In the course of the next five years he produced a dozen articles as well as continuing his work on the history of Hannover.

At the beginning of 1909 he remarried, this time a young woman of great vitality, with whom he fell passionately in love after she had been in his employ as Hausdame for only six weeks. It was a very different relationship from that of his first wife. Emma Thimme as a result of her youth and fervour, complimented Friedrich's rather introspective nature and re-awakened his zest for life. Soon he was the father of a son and henceforth settled into the world of a stable family relationship.

While his career with the Hannover library had been slow and undistinguished, the year 1913 was to provide exactly the type of

opportunity that he had been searching for since leaving university. In July of that year he was appointed Director of the Library of the Prussian Upper House in Berlin. The distinction of such a position was self-evident. Thimme had been recommended to the post by the curator of that library the famous Nationalökonomist Gustav Schmoller, and by Fürst Münster-Dernburg a member of the Upper House on whose family archives he had done some work. In the past the post of Director had been an almost exclusive preserve of the nobility and thus Thimme's appointment in view of his relatively young age, made the honour more distinguished yet. The sudden elevation from a relatively obscure position to one of pre-eminence necessitated moving to the Capital.²³ It was a move Thimme had yearned for since his student days and it was a stroke of luck which was not lost upon him. Berlin meant that he would now have much wider historical horizons and far more prestigious contacts, since he would be dealing with the leading personalities of Prussia and the Reich in a professional capacity. Obviously he had finally found his niche in life and was confirmed in this when the "Historikerwelt Berlins . . . ihn . . . mit offenen Armen aufnahm."²⁴

It was as Director of the Library of the Prussian House of Lords that he witnessed the outbreak of World War I, and through fortuitous circumstances found himself in the front-line of the political debate and developments that were to range the length and width of Germany during the next four years.

FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER I

¹The bulk of the information for the introductory section on Friedrich Thimme's youth was taken from the unpublished manuscript of Karl Thimme, Mein Bruder Friedrich und ich, (Stederdorf, November-December 1946). The manuscript is a compilation of personal reminiscences of Karl Thimme, in conjunction with the lively and voluminous correspondence carried on between him and his brother Friedrich. The correspondence included in the manuscript dates from 28, August 1878 to June 1938. A second unpublished manuscript by Wilhelm Thimme, Die elf Geschwister (1963) deals with the eleven Thimme children of whom Friedrich was the oldest male. The manuscript contains a brief though lucid account of Friedrich Thimme's life and is based on the personal reminiscences of Wilhelm Thimme and the correspondence between the latter and his brother Friedrich. There is also in existence a published volume by Hans Thimme, Aus der Vergangenheit Hannoverscher Pastorenfamilien (Luther - Verlag, Witten 1959), which traces the origins and development of the Thimme family from the early 16th Century into the 20th, concluding with the death of Friedrich Thimme's mother in 1925.

²Karl Thimme, Mein Bruder, pp. 1-2. Wilhelm Thimme, Geschwister (Friedrich), p. 1.

³Ibid., p. 3.

⁴Ibid., p. 3. Most of his life Thimme held different views on Christianity from his family, this was to lead to many soul-searching discussions with Wilhelm who had followed his father's footsteps as a Pastor.

⁵Thimme papers (unpublished letters 1885-1914) Friedrich Thimme to his father May 1885. Friedrich Thimme to his father (Pfingsten 1887) giving a detailed account of his weekly expenses. Friedrich Thimme to his father (winter semester 1887-88) again, a monetary accounting. See also Karl Thimme, Mein Bruder, p. 9, where Karl speaks of the money problems that Friedrich had and which were to be a recurring problem in later life.

⁶Friedrich's first complaint about the inability to follow his teachers are laid out in an early letter to his father from the Gymnasium at Verden in 1885. He speaks of the curse that hangs over him and the fear he lives in because of his inability to follow discussions. See Thimme papers (unpublished letters 1885-1914), Friedrich Thimme to his father 1885 (no date). This was to be a recurring topic in the correspondence with his parents and brothers throughout his scholastic career.

A similar fate had befallen Heinrich von Treitschke a few decades earlier. In the letters to his father the young Treitschke voiced a parallel complaint to those of Thimme, "Nach dem ersten Kollegbesuch stellte er fest dass er keinen Dozenten ganz verstehen könne. ' . . . und wenn ich, besonders in den ersten Wochen, manchmal während des Kollegs kein einziges Wort verstanden hatte, machte mich dies oft ganz trostlos'". Quoted in Walter Bussman, Treitschke, Sein Welt - und Geschichtsbild, (Musterschmidt - Wissenschaftlicher Verlag, Göttingen 1952), p. 5. Treitschke's maxim for life also held true for Thimme - "Werde ein tüchtiger Mensch und ersetze durch Deinen Wert, was dir die Natur versagt," Ibid., p. 10.

⁷Thimme papers (unpublished letters 1885-1914) Friedrich Thimme to his father, May 1887 and May 1887.

⁸Ibid., Friedrich Thimme to his father (winter semester 1887).

⁹The only evidence available for this "other" nature of Friedrich are oral family reminiscences.

¹⁰Thimme papers (unpublished letters 1885-1914) Friedrich Thimme to his parents, 24.6.1888. Also Friedrich Thimme to his father 8.7.1888.

¹¹Ibid., Friedrich Thimme to Karl Thimme 20.1.1892 and letter of 11.3.1892.

¹²Ibid., Friedrich Thimme to his parents 1.11.1893 also letter of 3.11.1893 also letter of 4.11.1893 also letter of 6.11.1893. See also Karl Thimme, Mein Bruder, p. 9.

¹³Ibid., Friedrich Thimme to his parents (no date, November 1893).

¹⁴Ibid., Friedrich Thimme to Karl Thimme 18.6.1895 and 21.12 1895. See also Karl Thimme, Mein Bruder, p. 11. Abschrift from Geschichte des Königreichs Hannover, letter of Gottfried Thimme to Emperor Wilhelm II, (Akten des Oberpräsidiums, Hannover, Niedersächsisches Staatsarchiv).

¹⁵Ibid., Friedrich Thimme to Karl Thimme 20.6.1895. See also Karl Thimme, Mein Bruder, pp. 11-12.

¹⁶Ibid., Friedrich Thimme to Karl Thimme 21.12.1895.

¹⁷Ibid., Friedrich Thimme to Karl Thimme 27.11.1895.

¹⁸Ibid., Friedrich Thimme to Karl Thimme 7.2.1897 and 1.4.1897.
See also Karl Thimme, Mein Bruder, p. 13.

¹⁹Heinrich von Treitschke had reached a similar conclusion early in his life, blaming the "Dämonen in meinen Ohren" for hindering his advancement in the academic world. Bussman Walter, Treitschke, pp. 21-22.

²⁰Ibid., p. 17

²¹Karl Thimme, Mein Bruder, pp. 16-17.

²²Ibid., p. 17. See also Thimme papers (unpublished letters 1885-1914) Friedrich Thimme to Karl Thimme (no date) 1902.

²³Friedrich Meinecke Nachlass (Geheimes Staatsarchiv, Berlin-Dahlem). Friedrich Thimme to Friedrich Meinecke, 1.8.1913.

²⁴Karl Thimme, Mein Bruder, p. 25.

CHAPTER II

SOLDIER ON THE HOME FRONT

Die Stunde war gekommen, wo das Volk der Dichter und Denker mit seinen Staatsmännern sich nur noch an das deutsche Dichterword zu halten hatte, dass nichts -- würdig die Nation ist, die nicht freudig alles setzt auf ihre Ehre.

Friedrich Thimme in
Bethmann Hollwegs Kriegsreden, 1919.

There was little in Friedrich Thimme's background either on the personal or academic side to mark him as a proponent of German militarism, or to qualify him as an expert on German politics. Rather he had left current political events to others and in the past had concentrated on developments within Germany in the previous Century. The confrontation between Germany and the Entente powers changed all that. His involvement in contemporary politics became total and where previously his contacts with the leading personalities had been in the line of duty, in his capacity as Librarian of the Prussian Upper House, he now actively sought out their ideas and thoughts, and almost overnight he became an expert on the internal policies of the Reich. His never tiring pen rose to the defense of his country in lieu of the sword he was unable to bear because of age and his partial deafness.

Whether he believed all he heard and saw regarding the outbreak of the war, or whether he had pursued any research of his own to reach some independent conclusions at this early stage, is difficult to ascertain. In some of the correspondence with his brother Wilhelm, the latter stated that Friedrich held the war to be justified and that the cause must be seen in the murder of the Austrian Crown Prince.¹

However, this is probably an unjustified assumption on his brothers part. It may be safely assumed that Friedrich Thimme was sophisticated enough in politics to see beyond that, despite his prior preoccupation with other aspects of German history. Undoubtedly he was as well, or better informed than most of his peers and had some inkling of the long festering problems underlying the developments of 1914. Nevertheless his enthusiasm for the war against the Entente powers lacked none of the fervour that underlay that of simpler and less well informed minds. Writing to his brother Karl on August 14, he spoke of the bitterness he felt in not being able to personally wield the allegorical battle axe against the enemy and expressed the hope that Germany would reach a higher stage of civilization and historical development through this cleansing experience.* Speaking as an "objective" historian he felt that it was well that things had progressed as they have, because in view of the solidarity between Germany and the Dual Monarchy, there could be little doubt as to the eventual victorious outcome of the conflict.²

Perhaps more importantly, Thimme was under no illusion, even at this early stage, about the defensive nature of this war. Like many of his compatriots he initially saw the conflict as a unique opportunity for Germany to expand and round out her territories and boundaries, and he wholly supported the expansionist policy which he

* Mir persönlich ist es bitter schwer dass ich nicht die Streitaxt selbst in die Hand nehmen kann. (Letter to Karl 14.8.1914.) Delbrück on the other hand, viewed the possibility of a war as "ein kulturelles Unglück", from which Germany may or may not emerge as the winner. From Annelise Thimme, Hans Delbrück als Kritiker der Wilhelminischen Epoche, Droste Verlag (Düsseldorf, 1955), pp. 116-117.

felt to be only just, in view of the circumstances. As initial goals he saw the aggrandizement of more colonies, the growth in the east at the expense of Russia and the rounding out of the Silesian and Lorraine territories, as well as the permanent occupation of the Channel coast to guard against England.^{3*}

There appeared to be little doubt in his mind that Germany would be entitled to the spoils of war, and what better opportunity to enjoy these, than at the expense of her "traditional" enemy France and her gigantic eastern neighbour.⁴ Unhampered by moral qualms or historical lessons Thimme espoused the same patriotic slogans as did the rest of the population. The astounding thing is the simplicity of his convictions at this early stage and the partiality of his arguments which he uses to justify his emotions. Clearly his judgement in the Fall of 1914 was not that of the "objective" historian that he claimed to be at the moment, but that of a German patriot caught up in all the fervour and emotions that such an event unleashes. At the moment he was little concerned with the rights or wrongs of the issues, but rather was following the time honoured dictum of "my country right or wrong".

This is not to say that Thimme was in any way less objective than those around him or his counterparts in other countries in similar surroundings and conditions, it is only to demonstrate that his "objectivity" must be seen in the reality of the circumstances,

* For a detailed discussion of the various factions among the intellectuals and their alignment towards annexationist policies see Klaus Schwabe, Wissenschaft und Kriegsmoral, Musterschmidt - Verlag (Göttingen, 1969), pp. 46-74. Thimme's stand approximated a middle position between the Pan-Germans (all deutsche) who wanted a new Mitteleuropa led by Germany, and the Social Democrats who were against territorial aggrandizement.

and what may be termed subjective analysis in retrospect, appeared to be totally objective and justified within the context of the given situation.*

Thimme would have been remiss as a civil servant and patriot had he acted along any other lines, as well as suffering possible ostracization by his peers. Undoubtedly some of his utterings must be seen as part propaganda (though unwittingly so) to convince both himself and those with whom he was in contact of the righteousness of their position.

Secondly there is little doubt that he along with most of his peers had no idea of the protracted nature of this war. Instead he expected it to be a short campaign resulting in a complete victory for the central powers and a speedy return to the status quo which would hopefully leave Germany in a more favourable continental position.

This optimism about the short duration of the war however, did not last very long, in fact not beyond the second month of the campaign. Because of his unusually well placed and reliable sources he already saw in October, that Germany's initial aims were not being realized according to the time tables put forth by the Army High Command (OHL). In a letter to his brother Wilhelm, on October 24, 1914, he allowed that he was in fact somewhat better informed about developments at the Front than most, and that because of this he was in a position to state that things are not exactly going to schedule or as planned. In fact he blamed the lack of progress after the initial successes on some highly placed person (probably Moltke or the Kaiser himself) and

*On his own views on his objectivity, see letter to Karl, 14.8.1914. "Vom objectiven Standpunkt des Historikers kann ich nur sagen: es ist gut, dass es so gekommen ist,".

remonstrated that because of the failure to set everything on one card in the west, the campaign had now lost its inertia and instead of sweeping successes it would in all probability develop into a protracted action with the elements of timing and locale, being left to the enemy, rather than to the German forces which the plan had called for.⁵ *

It is therefore with a certain amount of trepidation that Thimme realized that the overall plan was being given up piecemeal with the consequent loss of the elements of surprise and speed. Secondly Thimme was already aware that the French Army was not to be dismissed as lightly as had been expected in August after the first flush of success. He was also aware of the ascendancy of the military especially Ludendorff, whom he refers to as "der kommende Mann", a piece of insight which at this period can only enhance the accuracy and astuteness of his other observations, especially in view of later developments.⁶

Throughout these early months Thimme remained unusually well informed on the military aspects of the German war effort and usually made a correct analysis of future developments. In his own way he thereby acted as an armchair General for the rest of the family and kept them informed as to the true nature of the campaigns.

A problem to which he continually referred to and which will resurface again in his later correspondence, was the attitude and

* Obviously Thimme is talking about the Schlieffen Plan although he does not state this as such. He is extremely well informed at this point as to the overall strategy of the OHL and the tactical advantages to be derived from a successful completion of the Schlieffen Plan.

effectiveness of their Austrian allies. His pessimism regarding the benefits of the alliance with the Dual Monarchy was in all probability only a reflection of the thinking prevalent in many leading circles of Germany at the time.* Many recognized it as an unequal partnership and Thimme was undoubtedly representative when on the 18 November 1914, in a Letter to Karl he spoke of the Austrian "Schlamperei" and concluded that after all was said and done, the strong only remains strong by himself and through self-reliance: In other words he had little faith in Germany's Kampfgenossen.⁷

Yet despite these notes of pessimism in his private correspondence, there had been no let-up in his patriotism and the frequency of slogans. In the same letter he spoke of the war as being an uplifting experience for the German Volk which can only end in victory, and in the same vein rejected his father's and brother Ludwig's notion, that the war had been visited upon Germany as Gods punishment.** Instead, he saw it as an example of Gods grace, who had provided the Reich with the opportunity to reach new heights and thus demonstrate this greatness to the world.⁸

Parallel to his military interests, Thimme now threw himself

* A. J. P. Taylor, The Habsburg Monarchy 1809-1918, Harper Torchbooks, (N. Y., 1965) states "The Habsburg Monarchy was kept in being by German support;" p. 230 and C. A. Macartney in The Habsburg Empire 1790-1918, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, (London, 1968) describes the military collapse and lack of enthusiasm for a Pan-German struggle, pp. 812-830.

** Friedrich Meinecke on the other hand was more cautious in his approach "Mögen wir siegen oder geschlagen werden, so dürfen wir nun hoffen, ein gesünderes, edleres, freieres Nationaldasein in Zukunft zu führen.", thus reaching the conclusion that whatever the outcome, the end result would be internal peace which would benefit all. Friedrich Meinecke, Die deutsche Erhebung von 1914 (J. G. Cotta'sche Buchhandlung, Stuttgart, Berlin, 1914), p. 51.

wholeheartedly into the internal developments and especially into the political situation which had resulted in the Burgfrieden since the August days. Though at this time a non-political man, in the sense that he did not restrict himself or adhere to any official doctrine or carry a membership card in any one party, Thimme in his private convictions must be seen as basically conservative oriented, who looked towards the Monarchy for guidance in the political, social and economic sphere and who saw the quasi-authoritarian regime as the best possible form of government for Germany at the time and under the circumstances.* Despite this, it would be wrong to accuse him of narrowmindedness or of being unaware of the more progressive or liberal elements within Germany. He saw and recognized that certain democratizing changes were needed if Germany was to progress, and he further recognized that the Social Democrats could be, and should be, one of the guiding factors on the political scene. Not only because of their immense following and disproportionate power in the Reichstag, but also because they, perhaps more than any of other parties combined, offered some ideas for concrete and beneficial changes which would benefit a majority, and enhance Germany's position at home and abroad. Thimme was further impressed by the Social Democratic Party's (SPD) attitude towards the war and the fatherland in this time of crisis and lost no opportunity to make this clear to his countrymen. Like others he had

* One of the few times when he puts his political convictions on paper, occurred during his remonstrances against Heydebrand in the Summer of 1917. Writing in the Grenzboten on June 20th he states " . . . ich (bin) nicht Mitglied der konservativen Partei, wohl aber ein Vertreter des konservativen Gedankens und konservativer Tradition . . . ", p. 359.

expected that the Social Democrats would spare no means to embarrass the government by withholding its support for the war funds in the "August days". After all, for many years in the past, it had been axiomatic that anything remotely related to military expenditures received an almost automatic "no" vote from the Socialists. He was therefore not alone when he awaited the outcome of the Socialist vote with anxiety. Since a negative vote would not only delay further mobilization for the time being, but would result in an almost certain repressive move by the government which would lead to an irreparable rift in the political fabric, which would be paralleled throughout the population. For nearly a decade their slogan had been "keinen Pfennig, keinen Mann, diesem System" under which they also included the Austrian ruling clique, and thus expectations for cooperation were not high among government circles. As late as July 25, a manifesto reiterated that no drop of German blood would be spilled to satisfy the power lust and imperial interests of the German and Austrian ruling houses.⁹

In retrospect it can be seen that the Social Democratic Party took the only position it could take in August, without endangering the party as a cohesive force, and without undermining Germany's military potential and morale. As it was, the government had made contingency plans to deal with a recalcitrant Social Democratic Party in case of hostilities, and was prepared to apply a state of siege and to use force if the circumstances warranted it. The military being responsible only to the Emperor had no qualms about dealing harshly with the "left-wing radicals" and the Social Democratic Party leadership rightly suspected that the "other side" was waiting to unleash its enmity upon the "Sozis". Therefore the implicit, though unspoken threat, from the

authorities and the waves of enthusiasm which ran counter to the Social Democratic Party position, shaped their attitude on August 4th. Lastly, the realization that they were perhaps more chauvinistic than they liked to admit to themselves or to others, helped to unite the nation at this crucial moment, with the consequence that the Vaterland came first and foremost at the expense of international solidarity. The resulting Burgfrieden was a triumph for the bourgeois parties who had been united in their support for the government, while the left-wings disunity and wavering attitude led to their psychological defeat, although few realized it at the time.¹⁰

The Social Democrats action won the wholehearted approval of Thimme and his historical clique. Not only did he feel that the Socialists had made a politically wise decision, but that their action would also put Germany in indebtedness to the Party. The gratitude of the nation he felt would be eternal, and never would such a patriotic gesture be forgotten.¹¹ He himself attributed the change of heart to the fact that the Socialists recognized as their main enemy not democratic England or France, who after all had their own socialist parties, but to the enemy " . . . aller freiheitlichen Entwicklungen in Europa der Zarismus."¹² * It was against this reactionary regime that the Social Democrats felt compelled to do battle, because they could see that Russian supremacy on the continent would spell disaster for any socialist aspirations. Thimme was also convinced that the

* A further discussion on the intellectuals attitude towards Russia is to be found in Klaus Schwabe, Kriegsmoral, pp. 29-31. Delbrück also saw Russia as the chief enemy, calling the hatred against England a "Sentimentality"., Annelise Thimme, Hans Delbrück, p. 123.

Social Democratic Party had in fact acknowledged the moral superiority of Germany vis-à-vis Belgian neutrality, and this volte face he felt was born out of the realization that true internationalism lies in giving full rein to one's own nation, thereby helping it along to its destiny. The previous Landesveräter had suddenly become the most fervent patriots, and Thimme's amazement was only accentuated by the example of a socialist member of the Reichstag, Ludwig Frank, a former activist in the cause of better Franco-German relations, who now became one of the first volunteers and one of the first to die for his new found cause, thus gaining the dubious distinction of being the only member of Parliament to have laid down his life for Kaiser and fatherland.¹³

More amazing to Thimme however, were the internal changes brought about by the Burgfrieden. The anti-socialist campaign ceased, and the Reichsverband gegen die Sozialdemokratie stopped its hate propaganda in the face of such duty and devotion, which they could only match but not surpass. Such was the new found optimism on the political level that Thimme was moved to speak glowingly of this phenomenon which he felt would outlast the war. He saw it as a beginning of a new era for Germany where class differences and class awareness would disappear as the war progresses and where all of them, rich and poor, Catholic and Protestant because of their proximity at the front and their cooperation at home would emerge as a homogenous group devoid of class hatred. This euphoria, he felt, would undoubtedly be carried over into the post-war era where the resources of the country would be used to initiate a new era of social reform to bring about internal peace and to put Germany into the forefront of humanitarianism. All this of course presumed a German victory; a prospect which no one

doubted at this time.¹⁴

Perhaps the most ironic development of this whole episode and one in which Thimme wholeheartedly concurred, was the realization that now, after the Social Democratic Party had offered its blood they should be entitled to the same rules and benefits as the rest of the political spectrum. This, of course, was a popular theme among their political opponents and the cause of much resentment among Party members. It rankled the latter that they had never been taken at full value, or been treated as equal members in the political arena, despite the fact that for years they had represented the largest bloc of voters. Now suddenly because they and their members were needed for a national cause, they were to be granted what had been denied to them in peace.

As proof to his own conclusion that the Social Democratic Party had suddenly matured and therefore deserved mature treatment, Thimme offered the analysis that after all the years of wandering in Diaspora, the Socialist had discovered that Germany's militarism was indeed necessary and that, as their opponents had claimed for years, it was not an offensive military complex, but only the end result of a self-defense policy forced upon Germany by her encirclement (Einkreisung). Contrary to the facts as they existed in 1914 and contrary to what the Socialists themselves claimed, Thimme professed to speak or at least identify with them in his claim that the greatest danger besetting Germany was the "Joch des Moskowitertum".¹⁵

Yet despite this "danger" from the eastern "barbarians" he showed few qualms when in the same paragraph he deftly shifted from the purely defensive nature of the German campaign, to the possible goals that Germany should be striving towards, and the steps that should be taken

to justify her involvement in this struggle. His own plans for the post-war settlements included an extremely high indemnity to be put against the losers, on the assumption that if Germany's enemies were sufficiently crippled financially, they would then be unable to rebuild their armies and navies and thus would cease to be a threat for the foreseeable future.¹⁶ What he was proposing, here of course, was a blue print, one which was to be almost identical to the one used by the allies five years later against Germany, except that in 1919 few Germans cared to remember their own solutions to their possible victory. In view of such a crass pronouncement on how to deal with the defeated enemy, whether this was meant for public consumption or whether it only spelled out his private views, Thimme had little cause for later complaints that Germany had been unjustly dealt with.

Despite his enthusiasm and elation at finally being able to welcome the Socialists within the political folds of the Reich, Thimme did not fail to qualify his approval of their actions. As far as he was concerned there could be no compromise vis-à-vis the Monarchy. The positive aspect of the Social Democrats' program had to be acknowledged and taken into consideration, but at the same time the socialist tendencies must be handled circumspectly and held within limits (Schranken) so that the result will be positive towards the center, rather than negative towards the political and economic left. If these guidelines were to be followed he could foresee nothing but peace and prosperity in Germany's future despite initial obstacles. He concluded with what undoubtedly qualified as propaganda even within his own mind, by stating that Germany fostered by its moral superiority would turn victory into a social peace first within her own boundaries

and then without, "Ganz Deutschland will es!"; a prospect which undoubtedly spurred the French on to even greater defensive measures.¹⁷

Within three months Thimme's dialogue about the Social Democratic Party was to continue in another article published in the Süddeutsche Monatshefte in February 1915 under the title "Die Sozialdemokratie im neuen Deutschland". It is obvious at once that he was still caught up in the emotional impact of the Burgfrieden and that this feeling was not diminished by the Party's approval of further war credits which were voted upon almost unanimously in December, to continue what he calls ". . . den von Feinden aufgenötigten Kampf unerschütterlich bis zum siegreichen Ende . . . "¹⁸ In the same vein he continued to attribute qualities to the Social Democratic Party which they themselves were probably unaware of possessing. He claimed on their behalf that the Socialists were aware of Germany's Kriegsziele and that they agreed that these were in the best interest of Germany and hence, it was for this reason that they acquiesced in them. As a counter argument to possible disclaimers which could have been raised by the Social Democratic Party to this point, Thimme upheld the socialist parties of England and France as staunch supporters of Tsarism and thus arrived somewhat circuitously at the conclusion that the "International" had prostituted itself in the process of supporting such a reactionary regime, thereby opening the way for the German Socialists to dissociate themselves from the now defunct international alliance. To lend further weight to his argument Thimme professed to see within the Social Democratic Party a new found love for the nation which had manifested itself since the "August days", and that even the most radical of their members had now come to realize,

that the often reviled military had proven itself the saviour of Germany.¹⁹ It is doubtful if the Social Democratic Party membership was as conscious of these attributes as Thimme would have had his readers believe. They had never lacked in love for their country. It was only its militarism that they had objected to, and because of this, had been labelled "traitors" by the right-wing press and politicians. Thimme did realize however, that the political problem of the future would not be how to assimilate the patriotism of the Socialists within the German fabric, but rather how to best integrate this majority party, so that maximum benefits for Germany could be derived thereof, with the minimum disturbance to traditional patterns. With this in mind he put the onus on the Social Democratic Party, exhorting them to re-examine their attitude towards the Emperor and the Churches, the two factors which in his estimation had caused the greatest friction in the past, between right and left, and which appeared to pose the greatest damper to any kind of cooperation in the future.²⁰ In his analysis Thimme appeared to fall into the same trap as those he lumped together as right-wing. Being a loyal subject of the Monarchy it only appeared natural to him that the other side should change its position towards tradition, in other words, the monarchical way was the correct and moral way, and in order to achieve a modus vivendi it was incumbent upon the Socialists to change. Thimme took little cognizance of the fact that a majority of Germans may not have felt as he did or felt as strongly about the particular institution that he upheld, rather it was inconceivable to him that anyone could seriously doubt the usefulness of the Monarchy. Curiously enough while he could not praise the German Kaiser often enough and never

failed to paint a glowing picture of all his attributes, his symbolism and utility for Germany, he at the same time wasted no opportunity to vilify the Russian Tsar and the institutions associated with him. No words were too strong and no opportunity too small to put emphasis on the reactionary aspects of the Tsarist regime and he remonstrated against those who entered into agreements with Russia, especially Britain and France.²¹ Yet he found nothing paradoxical in the fact that in the same paragraph he would attribute all the qualities to the Kaiser which he denied the Tsar. Thus, we find him describing Wilhelm II as partaking in the soldiers' lot, sharing spiritually at least, their privations and their heroic deaths. With an eye to the Social Democratic Party Thimme painted the Hohenzollerns as "ein von Hause aus sozial gerichtetes Herrschergeschlecht" and he took literally the Kaiser's well intended phrase of "I know no more parties, only Germans".²² It is this regime he claimed with whom the Social Democratic Party should and must ally itself even closer, because only under this rule would they be able to grow and achieve greatness. It is only under the Monarchy he felt, that the Party could hope and help to inaugurate the millenium of social peace.

As in the previous article he again remonstrated with the Social Democratic Party regarding their position on the Churches. Thimme deplored the Kirchenaustritt of many prominent Socialist leaders and their less than friendly attitude towards ecclesiastical authorities. He admitted that this position on behalf of the Social Democrats was understandable in view of past developments, where the Protestant Church had been identified with the State and authority. Lately, however, he claims changes had taken place and he implored the

Socialist Party not to let itself be by-passed by current developments. As he put it, the State Church has metamorphised into a Volkskirche a phenomenon which was undoubtedly accelerated by the war. With respect to this he noted an increase in religious fervour among the population due to war privations and losses and since this was especially noticeable among the ranks in the front lines, the Social Democratic Party would hardly be in a position to ignore the attitude of its own supporters, who after all made up the majority of the front lines. To further reinforce his claim of a religious renewal amongst the German population, he asked the Social Democrats to acknowledge the fact that God was obviously on the "just" side, the German side, labelling as folly their refusal to acknowledge the signs of God and the democratic aspect that most of their followers believed in something that the Party officially denied as existing. His conclusions and advice to the Socialists were that only God and the Monarchy are what held Germany together and the quicker they realized this the better it would be for Germany.²³ With an eye to the future, Thimme speculated as to the role the Social Democratic Party would play in the new Germany, a Germany which would have, won the war of course. Realizing that the Social Democratic Party was a political necessity without which the earlier social policies and the massive war effort could not have been achieved, he admitted that the present state of the economy was in a large measure due to the concerted efforts of the labour groups, operating at the behest of the Social Democratic Party leadership. He was also willing to admit that because of socialist pressures in the past the state had moved perceptibly closer towards the day when many of the socialist ideals would become reality and an

acknowledged part of life. Because of this he foresaw vast economic changes taking place, most importantly in the prevention of a new economic feudalism such as that which had developed after the 1870-71 period and which had dominated the German economy until 1914. According to socialist demands he agreed that the state would have to play a leading role in all sectors of life, after the war. In effect it would mean a continuation of war time controls, if such changes were to be brought about relatively fast and with a minimum of political upheaval.²⁴

The end result of the forthcoming peace, he felt should not be just a victorious Germany, but a socially re-oriented nation, a rejuvenated nation led by the Monarchy in conjunction with the Social Democratic Party. In view of these developments (and there was little doubt why they should not come about) it was to be hoped that the Socialists would drop all pretense of revolution and violent changes, and instead would concentrate on working within the existing framework.

Thus, at this particular moment in February of 1915, the future looked bright and there appeared to be no storm clouds on the horizon. Almost as an afterthought he added, "with the Kaiser and the present Chancellor, how can we fail?"²⁵

While Thimme had worked out the internal political changes to his own satisfaction, and what he hoped to everyone else's too, and had reconciled himself to the political changes that had taken place, developments at the front had little in common with the rosy picture he painted of the home front.

What pressed home the fact that the war was indeed still being fought, and that the fatherland was suffering losses and would continue

to do so, was the death of his own brother Hermann. Oddly enough for a man who had been actively talking about heroic deaths, glory, dying for the fatherland and similar patriotic slogans, he took the news of such an immediate occurrence very badly. It is difficult to ascertain as to why this should be so, for surely he must have been aware that war can and does cause suffering and does this on an entirely unselective basis. Yet in a letter to his brother Wilhelm he castigated against England, on the assumption that it was an English bullet that killed Hermann, and he spoke of the unquenchable hatred he now had for the English.²⁶ Certainly some of this hatred and lust for revenge may have been attributable to the immediacy of the loss and the initial shock. Yet one cannot discount his feelings as being symptomatic of the time, in that everyone was prepared on the one hand to speak in glowing terms about patriotism and heroic deeds, yet at the same time expect the war to remain something distant and removed from everyday life. Undoubtedly much of this may be attributed to the fact that there were no war fronts within Germany and as such no war experiences (compared to World War II) and because of this one could forever remain euphoric and optimistic about the outcome, because reality was removed and the immediacy escaped those who were not there. Secondly, many of the non-combatants on both sides still expected this war to be a repetition of 1870-71, a short furious engagement with a mobile front and with minimum losses and maximum gains.

Thimme's optimism about the outcome of the war remained unchecked however, in the summer of 1915 and if anything, he had become more certain of final victory: In his estimation two weeks were all that would be needed to assure final success in the east and

after that it will be nothing more than a clean-up operation in the west, even if Italy were to enter on behalf of the Entente powers.²⁷ While it is difficult to accept such an unwavering belief in an immediate victory, especially in view of his usually well placed and well informed sources, it may be attributable to the fact that he along with most Heimkämpfers needed a psychological victory. His unbound fervour, coupled with the fact that he was prevented from direct participation in the struggle, made it harder for him to bear the uncertainty than if he had been directly involved at the front. At any rate his expectations were both a rationale for his own beliefs and a "salve" to tide him over frequent fits of depression, which could largely be attributed to his deafness. These expectations also acted as a relief valve from the pressures of his work and writings.

There was no question of downheartedness even as the war entered a new phase, with Italy declaring hostilities against the central powers. Indeed, Thimme appeared elated at the prospect of having one more foe for Germany, and spoke of a genuine battle for existence (Existenzkampf) which would now take place, and out of which Germany and Austria would arise even mightier than they had been before. His elation of course, was helped by the fact that he thought very little of Italy's fighting capabilities. This is illustrated by the fact that he even felt Austria capable of rising to the challenge of defeating her traditional enemy.²⁸ Why Thimme should be elated over an expanded war is not entirely clear, because there is little doubt that he recognized the dangers of a three front war, and that even if the hope for ineptitude of the Italians were to come true, they would still tie down a considerable number of troops

which could have been employed much more effectively elsewhere. He was also aware of course, that the breakaway of Italy was a moral victory for the Entente powers, and as such was to have a far greater impact than the mere fact of her supplying some additional manpower.

Perhaps the explanation of his elation must be sought on a more personal level. The breakaway of Italy provided the opportunity for total teutonic chauvinism. Thimme and others could now see themselves as the true defenders of civilization, the lonely Teuton opposed by all the evil forces in the world, surrounded by enemies on every side, and yet proudly maintaining his stance. Certainly nothing could have been more calculated and designed to uplift morale at home as the picture of a deserted and isolated Germanic people pitted against the whole non-Germanic world.

There was in Thimme's opinion, only one area, where Germany was failing to live up to expectations, and was in fact being surpassed by her enemies. According to him this was in the field of propaganda. With regards to this he felt that the allies were far ahead and that the gap appeared to be widening considerably with each passing day and each phase of the war. Rather than admitting however, that Germany's moral position may not have been all that it was made out to be and therefore may not have been as justifiable or defensible as claimed, it was obvious to him that the allies were simply much more advanced and adapt in the use of lies and in the distribution of their claims of German barbarity and guilt. This type of superiority he felt could become dangerous in the end, because a German victory would be that much more difficult to accept by the defeated powers if the psychological base of German justifica-

tion had been destroyed by allied propaganda. Therefore, it was in this one particular area, where a concerted effort had to be made by those at home, to provide an intellectual and moral base on which to found Germany's case and with which to arm the men in the trenches. "Längst ist Deutschland ja auch auf den geistigen Kampfplatz getreten. Unsere Regierung, unsere Staatsmänner, unsere Presse, die grosse Mehrzahl unserer Gelehrten, alle stehen sie in dem schweren Kampf gegen Neid, Hass und Verleumdung, für Wahrheit, Billigkeit und Gerechtigkeit."²⁹ Yet the great battle, the Verleumdungsfeldzug, waged by Britain and France on all fronts, in their newspapers, in the use of ideas and documents, had given the enemy such a clear lead that it would be difficult to catch up and perhaps impossible to surpass them, (as it turned out, his fears were confirmed, much more so than he had thought possible in his darkest moments). Thimme was especially concerned about clarifying the case of Austria-Hungary to the world at large. He admitted that perhaps her diplomacy had not always been as circumspect as it could have been, and perhaps the Dual Monarchy had been too cool in her relations towards her eastern neighbours, and somewhat too calculating in her endeavours, but he stated, by no stretch of the imagination was her diplomacy controlled by war fever, or grandiose ideas of conquest, as her opponents now claimed. Rather Thimme attributed these qualities to Russia.³⁰ As a further attempt to clarify the question of guilt at this early stage, he again puts forth his idea, that perhaps a large share of the blame should be attributed to England, who by her desire for World control via her navy, and by her machinations to preserve the balance of power on the continent had done as much, or more than any other nation,

to bring about the present condition. Despite "der Deutschland aufgezwungene Krieg . . . steht (es) gut um Deutschlands Sache, gut im Westen, gut im Osten, gut in der Heimat."³¹ and as long as the internal unity continued, there was no reason not to be optimistic about the future. Through a process of extension, the war to Thimme, had thus become a positive factor in Germany's development, because of the cooperation it had elicited, on the surface at least, amongst all the classes. "Diese einmütige nationale Zusammenarbeit . . . zeigt sich in der freudigen Entschlossenheit des ganzen Volkes, jedes Opfer an Gut und Blut für das Vaterland zu bringen . . . " and it may very well be that this was the greatest sacrifice any nation in the history of mankind had ever put forth.³²

It is precisely this sacrifice, blind or otherwise, of the German people and the entailing unity that to him represented the greatest monument to success, regardless of the outcome of the war. What Thimme apparently did not realize or did not want to realize was the implicit failure that such a system entailed if it was only successful under duress. He never lost a moment's thought on the possibility that perhaps German unity was not as deeprooted as it appeared, and that it was only because of the war that it existed rather than in spite of it. The difference escaped him and others, and because of the failure to be recognized by its leading thinkers, points to a sad but nevertheless true state of affairs.* German

* Klaus Schwabe in Kriegsmoral, reaches a similar conclusion, stating that the defense of the Reich led to unity, rather than a genuine desire for political peace, "Mit dem Ruf nach der Verteidigung der Existenz des Reiches hatte, . . . das deutsche Volk sein 'Allerheiligstes' wiedergefunden.", p. 40. Theodor Geiger in Demokratie ohne Dogma (Szczyesny Verlag, Munich) states "Die Nation ist

unity was not brought about from within as it should have been in a progressive democratic nation, but rather was imposed from without at considerable cost to Germany in the end, a cost far greater than that paid by other nations for the attainment of internal peace. Whereas Thimme foresaw the continuation of the Gemeinsamkeit beyond the war, he should have been one of the first to realize, that once the pressures were removed, the whole system would revert to its pre-war factionalism because little or no change had taken place from within. Of course, to him the changes had already taken place. The very fact that the Social Democratic Party had finally been granted full recognition at least in theory and that for the time being its member had risen above the "second class citizen" status coupled with the fact that the Party had gained temporary respect from its parliamentary opponents, was a measure of progress and change. After all, the very fact that nearly everyone saw the Sozis now as their patriotic equal and thus Deutschtreu, rather than the traitors of pre-1914, could be seen as a step in the right direction. Thimme however, was prepared to carry this one step further. To him it appeared to be axiomatic that the differences between the bourgeois parties and the Socialists should have disappeared overnight, either by common consent or imperial edict, without taking into account however, that economic gulfs are not removed by decree or by slogans.

eine Vorstellung ohne Substanz. Sie kann sich daher nur in streitbarem Verhältnis zu einem Gegner, . . . verwickeln. Ohne einen wirklichen oder eingebildeten Gegner kann sie nicht bestehen. Selbst dort, wo im Namen der Volksgemeinschaft vor innerem Zwist und Klassenkampf gewarnt wird [as Thimme did] selbst dort ahnt man nicht selten eine tiefere Absicht: mit doppelter Wirkung die militanten Kräfte zum Schlag nach aussen zu sammeln.", p. 157.

Of course the condescending attitudes of men like Thimme towards what they considered to be the new found patriotism of the Socialists, also represented a vast misreading of the past and present political climate. In the past it had been accepted as a natural law, that the further to the right of the political spectrum one stood, the more patriotic one was or had to be. Conversely the further left one moved politically, the less Vaterlandstreu one became and the less chauvinistic one's impulses were likely to be. These had been the guidelines followed by generations of political analysts and supporters of the conservative and pro-monarchist factions. Suddenly in the flush that had followed the "August days" of 1914 they claimed to have discovered a new political fact; a sudden awareness that the Socialists were Germans after all, heart, body and soul, and that their Germanic impulses did not lag behind those of the most rightist extremist. More dispassionate observers on the Social Democratic Party side during this period were wont to point out that this quality had been with the Party all the time and that it was only the narrow-mindedness and bias of the conservatives and bourgeoisie that had prevented their seeing it, and had in fact suppressed this attribute in the Social Democratic Party and denied its existence prior to 1914. However, for the bourgeois parties to acknowledge such a bias would of course have been impossible, for the recognition of such a fact would have meant the negation of their policies towards the Socialists over the last quarter of a century, a step which they were not prepared to take. Instead Thimme could write in all seriousness and honesty that " . . . der Krieg (ist) für uns die glänzende Rechtfertigung unserer Sozialpolitik, die höchste Offenbarung des Sozial-

prinzip, die stärkste Mahnung an unser soziales Gewissen."³³ Accord-
ing to his interpretation this statement was to be seen as a justifi-
cation of past behaviour towards the Social Democratic Party and was
designed to underline the fact that they (the ruling classes) had
behaved correctly by not suppressing the Sozis too much before the war,
otherwise they obviously would not have been so cooperative now. It
also tended to confirm bourgeois belief that "they" had given them
enough leeway at the right time and that the present situation was
the fruitition of their correct social policy. The logical conclu-
sion to be derived thereof in Thimme's view was that Marx had been
wrong and that his theories had been proven null and void by the
German example, because the Revolutionstheorie was obviously dead,
the state had not collapsed (at least not in 1915), rather equaliza-
tion had progressed peacefully in all sectors, both at home and at the
front.³⁴

"Der Krieg als Vater aller Dinge . . . " brought about " . . .
eine völlige Einheit und Geschlossenheit unseres Volktums, eine nationale
Zusammenarbeit aller Klassen, Berufstände und Parteien zu einem Zweck."³⁵
While this analysis was undoubtedly honest and forthright from Thimme's
own social and political standpoint, it nevertheless accentuates the
callousness and perhaps shallowness with which the Social Democratic
Party was regarded by the so-called middle class. It was a party
to be used for the benefit not of Germany as a whole, but only for
the Germany which the middle classes saw as their creation and
in which their own ideas as to what was truly German would hold
court. If this could be accomplished with the cooperation of
the Social Democratic Party so much the better and easier it would

be, but as to the fact that it would get done their way they left little doubt at the time.

Though totally absorbed in the internal developments of the nation, Thimme did not neglect to keep up with events at the front. In a letter to his brother Wilhelm, dated 6.2.1916, we are once again reminded that as a non-combatant his involvement in events at the front was often far more total than his sedentary existence would at first glance suggest. The birth of a son to Wilhelm, provided occasion for such involvement, "Wir freuen uns ausnehmend darüber, dass es gerade ein Junge ist; denn nichts tut unserem Vaterland heute mehr not als eine möglichst grosse Schar neuer kräftiger Vaterlandsverteidiger.", a piece of patriotism, that his brother undoubtedly did not share.³⁶ This "cannon fodder" mentality was to manifest itself again at a later period of German history, and thus was not an exclusive preserve of Thimme. However, the fact that a man of his stature and intellectual insight could give himself over to such sentiments, only points out the obvious, that the war had indeed produced a psychosis which knew no class boundaries, when slogans and platitudes were to be voiced. In the same letter, Thimme once again bemoaned the fact that he himself had been unable to partake in the fighting, other than in spirit, "Mir ist es immer schmerzlich geblieben . . . , dass ich nicht selbst mit dreinschlagen konnte;" but he consoled himself with the fact that he could at least preach and convey the proper patriotic values to the youth of the nation in the fervent hope that they would grow up and accept them.³⁷ Not content with remaining safely at the home front, and using his considerable talents to further the cause of the nation, he also at

one point entertained the idea of personally visiting the front to gain some first hand impressions and perhaps to still his thirst for revenge against the British, though he does not specify how. At any rate he made it clear in a letter to his wife that he would not be satisfied with a safely guided tour to the rear echelons, but rather that he would insist on being allowed right into the front line trenches where the action was.³⁸ Whether this desire arose out of an innate sense of duty or whether it was just plain curiosity is unclear, at any rate it is doubtful if much came of the scheme, as the Oberste Heeresleitung (OHL) was in all probability kept busy with the day to day conduct of the war without conducting guided tours for frustrated academics from the home front.

FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER II

¹Karl Thimme, Mein Bruder Friedrich und ich (unpublished manuscript, 1946), p. 27.

²Thimme papers, (unpublished letters 1914-1918) Friedrich Thimme to Karl Thimme, 14.8.1914.

³Ibid.

⁴Karl Thimme, Mein Bruder, reference to letter dated 11.11.1914, p. 27.

⁵Thimme papers (unpublished letters 1914-1918) Friedrich Thimme to Wilhelm Thimme, 24.11.1914.

⁶Ibid., p. 2.

⁷Ibid., Friedrich Thimme to Karl Thimme 18.11.1914.

⁸Ibid., p. 3.

⁹For a closer examination of the Social Democratic Party's position during the July crisis, and the vote on the war credits see Carl E. Schorske, German Social Democracy 1905-1917, pp. 285-294.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 287.

¹¹Friedrich Thimme, "Die Sozialdemokratie im Neuen Deutschland" Süddeutsche Monatshefte, No. 2., November 1914, p. 156.

¹²Ibid., p. 157.

¹³Ibid., p. 158. See also Eberhard v. Vietsch, Bethmann Hollweg (Harald Boldt Verlag, Boppard am Rhein, 1969), p. 217.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 158-160.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 162.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 162, see also this page for full text of proposals. For a complete examination of the Kriegsziele in 1914, see Fritz Fischer, Griff nach der Weltmacht (Droste Verlag, Düsseldorf, 1961), pp. 102-104.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 163.

¹⁸Friedrich Thimme, "Die Sozialdemokratie im Neuen Deutschland" (2nd Article) Süddeutsche Monatshefte, No. 46, February 1915, p. 702.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 703.

²⁰Ibid., pp. 703-704.

²¹Ibid., p. 705, see also Annelise Thimme, Hans Delbrück als Kritiker der Wilhelminischen Epoche (Droste Verlag, Düsseldorf, 1955), p. 123.

²²Ibid., pp. 705-706.

²³Ibid., p. 707.

²⁴Ibid., pp. 709-710.

²⁵Ibid., p. 711.

²⁶Thimme papers (unpublished letters 1914-1918) Friedrich Thimme to Wilhelm Thimme 16.3.1915 and Friedrich Thimme to Karl Thimme 18.11.1915.

²⁷Ibid., Friedrich Thimme to Wilhelm Thimme 7.5.1915, pp. 1-2.

²⁸Ibid., pp. 1-2.

²⁹Friedrich Thimme, "Deutschland und der Weltkrieg", Internationale Monatshefte, No. 1, 1.10.1915, pp. 45-46.

³⁰Ibid., p. 54.

³¹Ibid., p. 55.

³²Friedrich Thimme, Carl Legien, Die Arbeiterschaft im Neuen Deutschland (Leipzig, 1915), p. 222.

³³Ibid., p. 227.

³⁴Ibid., p. 229.

³⁵Ibid., p. 222.

³⁶Thimme papers (unpublished letters 1914-1918) Friedrich Thimme to Wilhelm Thimme 6.2.1916, p. 1.

³⁷Ibid., p. 1.

³⁸Ibid., Friedrich Thimme to Emma Thimme 16.6.1916, also letter of 20.6.1916.

CHAPTER III

CRISIS ON THE HOME FRONT

Der Krieg hat das ganze deutsche Volk in allen seinen Gliedern, Schichten und Parteien geeint; mehr als jemals in unserer Geschichte sind wir ein einig Volk von Brüdern.

Thimme 1915
(from Suum cuique)

By the middle of 1916, it was becoming obvious even to the ever-optimistic Thimme that developments at home were not as satisfactory as they had been a year ago. A certain amount of skepticism is apparent from his letters and he was aware of impending food shortages which were already evident and which were to increase towards the winter of 1916-17. He noted the curtailment of certain food items like butter and potatoes and the ever increasing competition among the population for the attainment of these staples. Yet he was at a loss to explain why these shortages should occur.¹ Obviously his rationalization as a city dweller left him unaware of the manpower problems that agriculture was experiencing as a result of the war and the consequent loss of production that this entailed.*

Politically he was aware that the Burgfrieden in the summer of 1916 was not as cohesive as it had been even six months earlier.

* On the simplest level the use of vast numbers of horses and agricultural labourers on the front left many farms understaffed both in animal and manpower. The use of female labour could not always make up for this shortage, though their contribution was an important factor in keeping industrial production at optimum levels. On the problems of food shortages and the disastrous "Kohlrübenwinter" of 1916-17, see Diether Stolze, Michael Jungblut, eds., Der Kapitalismus, (Deutsche Buch-Gemeinschaft, Berlin, 1969), pp. 239-242. On the similar problems that faced England during this time, see Shepard B. Clough, Thomas Moodie, Carol Moodie, Economic History of Europe: Twentieth Century, (Harper Torchbooks, New York, 1968), pp. 46-54.

He himself had just finished publishing a volume of collective essays under the title, Vom inneren Frieden des deutschen Volkes, wherein some of the best political, social and economic minds of the time put down their views on the truce between labour and government, the socialists and the conservatives. The collection attempted to arrive at some synthesis as to what was happening between the various parties, among the religious groups, and among the population as a whole. Optimistically subtitled, "Ein Buch gegenseitigen Verstehens und Vertrauens" the volume attempted to cover as wide a body of opinions as possible and succeeded in doing just that. It became at once obvious that the euphoria of 1914 had given way to the hard realization that the Burgfrieden was not now, nor ever had been, what everyone had expected it to be and Thimme made this clear in his introductory remarks. Rather it had shown itself to be a surface phenomenon with little chance of permanence, under the prevailing conditions. It was with this realization in mind that the volume on the "Innere Frieden" was presented to the public, in the hope that its illustrious rainbow of contributors would somehow overcome the lethargy that had set in during the last year in the political arena. It was to be an attempt to contain the poison that was once again spreading through the veins of all political factions. Thimme's contribution in this task was gargantuan, because he took it upon himself to assemble writers from different ideological camps and coordinate their efforts into a single cause. He was therefore justified in his expectation that his own part in such a scheme would at least merit some recognition on the official level.* 2

* As he had earlier in his work on "Die Arbeiterschaft im neuen

Reaction to the work was immediate, and on the whole favourable. In the parliamentary circles the book redeemed Thimme in the eyes of those who had taken exception to his "Die Arbeiterschaft in Neuen Deutschland" and he received a special commendation from the President of the Herrenhaus for it. Among conservative circles the volume did not elicit loud enthusiasm but at least it aroused interest and stimulated discussion, and what Thimme considered most important, it re-awakened a willingness to once again attempt some effort at reconciliation with the Socialist faction.³ Though Thimme felt that the Socialists reaction towards the publication was the most favourable, he was aware and concerned about the problems within that party. The ideological split between the radicals and the moderates had by now reached a crisis point and he was only too aware that even an open split was not beyond the realm of possibilities. It was this factionalism within the party that he saw as one of the crucial developments of the period. He was aware and concerned about the implications such a split would have upon Germany's internal situation, as well as the effect it might produce upon the enemy. Even the conservatives were grudgingly reacting in a positive fashion, as they too were gradually becoming aware of the fact that renewed strife with the Socialists would at this time not be to their advantage, even if it should result in a break up of the Social Democratic Party. The fact was that responsible politicians and factional leaders on

Deutschland" wherein he had also done his utmost along with many others to achieve some permanence in the Burgfrieden. Carl E. Schorske in German Social Democracy 1905-1917. states, "A literary monument to the hope of bourgeois intellectuals and majority Socialist leaders in a transcendence of class struggle through the war effort is a volume of essays published by Friedrich Thimme and Carl Legien under the title, Die Arbeiterschaft im neuen Deutschland, p. 294.

both sides were aware that the war had as yet to be won, and that this could only be achieved with a united country backing the men in the field, and with a politically stable situation at home.

Thimme also took cognizance of the pessimistic outlook among military circles in the summer of 1916. The prevailing spirit appeared to be one of defeat, brought on perhaps by the knowledge of an English offensive, one which the German military felt could be difficult to contain. There was the further knowledge that Russia too was preparing to launch a massive attack and both these factors combined to dampen spirits at home and at the front. In Timme's case the pessimism was of a somewhat more personal nature. The developments at the front threatened to diminish the effect of his publication. By relegating it to the immediate background, the hope for effect, the immediacy and note of urgency would be lost in the process.⁴ In his own concluding essay to the volume, Timme reiterated his earlier position with regards to the responsibilities of the Kaiser and the nation in precipitating the war. Germany as he saw it, was the victim of circumstances, and had been drawn into the conflict despite its Friedenswillen and Friedenszuversicht.⁵ The Kaiser again was upheld as the only unifying force, whose words alone could provide direction for those at home and at the front, and eventually lead them to victory. In the same vein he wrote that he was aware "dass jeder Deutsche das Beste seines Vaterlandes will wenn es auch nicht alle auf gleichen Wegen suchen mögen, und dass ein jeder bereit ist, seine letzten Kräfte für dieses Vaterland hinzugeben."⁶ Therefore the only barrier against total cooperation would appear to have been in Timme's view, the lack of recognition on all sides that everyone was working

towards the same goal: the glory of the Reich. Certainly this analysis was correct on a very superficial level, but given the political realities of the time, the solution was not only untenable, but also utopian. He expected to bring about changes in a time of crisis which had been impossible to bring about during a quarter century of peace and stability. A final word he addressed to his academic colleagues, urging them to leave their religious, financial and political ivory towers and to join together in the common national aspirations, and he contrasted their attitude with that of labour, in whose ranks and sentiments he professed to detect one of the few positive forces within the country, at least thus far. Labours attitude towards the war had of necessity been more a direct contribution, rather than of an intellectual nature, and it was obviously this bodily contribution that Thimme had in mind. He acknowledged that no other group had contributed so much and so willingly both at home and abroad. It was their ranks which were being decimated at the front, and it was their families who were suffering the greatest privations at home. In view of this he considered it only just, that their reward should have been political equality. It is apparent that the chicanery of such a proposition escaped him and his peers, their raison d'etre was not democracy, but a reward for shedding blood. While this type of tokenism permeated the whole class of which Thimme was representative, it must be realized that they did not view their actions in this manner. Instead they saw their "cooperation" with the Sozis as a distinct compromise upon their principles, another sacrifice necessitated by the war.⁷ "Der Geist der Ideen von 1914, der für alle Zeiten das höchste nationale Evangelium bleiben wird, . . . ", had to be maintained

at all costs and this entailed that the Volk as never before had to turn to the Monarchy for the solutions and for guidance. For as he pointed out, the greatest danger to a united front between social and conservative factions lay not in their mutual distrust, but in their failure to recognize the wisdom and sincerity of the Hohenzollerns. If this mistrust had ever fully materialized then Germany would have been lost indeed.⁸

Partly Thimme's unbounded optimism and faith in the Monarchy was founded on his monumental misreading of the political climate in the frontline trenches. In his estimation, the returning soldiers would not fall into the same political trap again, that had paralyzed the political scene before the war. Rather he felt that the "Fronterlebnis" (front experience) had taught them togetherness, equality and the value of the other classes, and he felt that these experiences would be carried over into their civilian roles. Otherwise if this were not so, why would they be spilling their blood unless they believed in an equal future?⁹

However, even within the pages of the volume wherein Thimme gave vent to his feelings there were those who questioned his political analysis. Ludwig Haas in an article entitled "Die Partei der Schützengrabenkämpfer", put little faith in Thimme's hopes, writing instead, "Der Sozialist wird als Sozialist nach Hause kommen; der Demokrat bleibt Demokrat und der Konservative konservativ."¹⁰ Obviously Haas' observations proved to be much more astute in the light of later developments, and he was not misled by patriotic slogans and professions of equality, fraternity ... ad nauseum. Thimme on the other hand saw the solution in the "Weckruf des Monarchen, die mahnende

Stimme des Christentums das edle Beispiel unserer Helden draussen, das unsterbliche Teil und Gedächtniss unserer gefallenen Brüder. Der Geist gegenseitigen Verstehens und Vertrauens und der Geist der Schlützengräber sie werden beide die Genien des künftigen Deutschlands sein. Deutsches Volk Sorge und trachte, dass du dieses Volk seiest!"¹¹ *

Needless to say that the only way these hopes could be accomplished was through a total German victory at the front, a precondition in all of Thimme's writings and analysis during the war years, and one from which he never deviated. An article of his in Die Grenzboten a bi-weekly of Free-conservative leanings in January of 1917, was entitled "Siegen, Siegen, Siegen". In it he established a new zenith of patriotic fervour, popular slogans and strategic nonsense with his unabashed outpourings as to the direction and aims of the German war effort. As in the past, victory (siegen) according to him, must, is, and will continue to be the only goal of all Germans, especially after the "schnöden" rejection of the peace proposals by the Entente which President Wilson had put forth.** Now something close to

* The sentiments expressed therein of course represented the spectrum of patriotic slogans; Monarchy, Christianity, Heroes, mutual trust and understanding, the "Spirit of the Trenches" etc. -- it was a clarion call to the Volk.

** President Wilson had offered to mediate between the opposing sides after his re-election in November 1916. "On December 20 an American note went out to the belligerents: . . . Its first effect was in fact a German attempt to anticipate it . . . The reasons for the German move were in part military . . . On December 12 the so-called German peace offer was launched. It was essentially a propaganda move, ostensibly proposing negotiations but carefully avoiding any concrete proposals. In their parliaments first, then officially, it was indignantly rejected by the Allies, who dubbed it a ruse and a trap. . . . As to the American proposal itself it met with a German rejection." (Italics mine.) Rene Albrecht-Carrie, The Meaning of

total mobilization of men and material must be achieved he felt, to grasp that victory which was just around the corner.¹² The last drop of blood and the last possession of each individual should be put at the disposal of the nation. "Heerespflicht und Dienstpflicht umfassen ja heute das ganze Volk", even intellectuals he might have added, and everyone should be prepared for total privations, physically and politically, to assure success.¹³

What he was advocating here was not only sacrifice on the part of the Volk, but also that it should subject itself to a military dictatorship, nominally led by the Kaiser; "Fort mit dem unfruchtbaren Streit um den Einfluss des Parlamentes . . . " and consequently away with political parties and with what little democratic progress they had achieved in the past. The irony of this position escaped him, in view of his earlier position that the war was being fought ostensibly to achieve a greater humanization within Germany and in the "Vasallenstaaten" which she would henceforth dominate economically and politically.¹⁴

Thimme took to task those who were now openly criticizing Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg, especially the conservative elements who were looking for a scapegoat both for the internal and external failures. Thimme's assertion being that the majority of the nation, the Kaiser and Hindenburg were firmly behind the Chancellor and there-

the First World War (Prentice-Hall Inc., New Jersey, 1965), pp. 56-57. See also Fritz Fischer, Griff nach der Weltmacht (Droste Verlag, Düsseldorf, 1961), pp. 384-387, and A. J. P. Taylor, A History of the First World War (Berkeley Publishing Corp., New York, 1963), pp. 99-103. Thus seen from the allied side, it was the German peace proposals that they "indignantly" rejected, rather than the Germans rejecting an allied proposal as Thimme suggested.

fore there was little point in the conservative attack, except to give the enemy aid and comfort. Rather he suggested their criticism should be directed to the Kaiser who as "Oberster Kriegsherr" initiated the peace proposals for which Bethmann was being blamed, and who was responsible also for the restrictions put upon the U-Boot campaign, which in the eyes of the conservatives amounted to another failure.¹⁵ There was absolutely no doubt in Thimme's mind that the Chancellor would remain, and that the latter's optimism for final victory was as indomitable as his own. He was further heartened by the fact that Bethmann appeared to be enjoying the support of those who counted and therefore needed to fear little from his opponents. Once again Thimme's misreading of the future was not only characteristic of the time and his type of mentality, but also incredible in view of his sources and his own position in the Upper House.* Secondly, the fact that things were different from what they appeared to be even to men of his caliber, only made the confusion reigning at the popular level all the more understandable. Elaborating on his earlier ideas as to what steps Germany should take with regards to her opponents after the war he viewed German hegemony over Europe as a necessary measure designed to assure her the fruits of her victory. Consequent steps as he saw them in January of 1917, would have included the dissolution of the British and Russian Empires, an even more drastic proposal than the Entente plans regarding Germany. At any rate his plans at this time showed a distinct escalation on his earlier position of 1914, and was paralleled in a shift of his hatred from the traditional enemy

* Ernst Troeltsch reached the same conclusion. See his Spektator Briefe, Ausätze Über die deutsche Revolution und die Weltpolitik 1918-22 (Scientia Verlag Aalen, 1966) pp. 19-23.

France to the erstwhile cousin England, and her ally Russia.¹⁶ In order to legitimize his own activities as a quasi-propagandist and possibly in order to ease his mind about some of the more obvious literary excesses he had indulged in, under the guise of patriotism, he labelled his own contributions to the war effort "vaterländischer Hilfsdienst," a rubric which covered much ground.¹⁷

Once again demonstrating his impeccable sources, Friedrich Thimme confidentially informed his brother in January of 1917, that unrestricted submarine warfare against England was about to begin, a step with which he was in obvious agreement, his only regret being that it had not taken place earlier. This development he correctly analyzed as a victory for Hindenburg and the army, thus bringing Germany one step closer to military dictatorship, hence his condoning of the action.¹⁸

In a subsequent article in Deutsche Politik, "U-Bootkrieg und innerer Frieden" Thimme propounded these views further and appeared to be vindicated in his belief that the unrestricted submarine warfare, had strengthened rather than weakened the national fabric, as had been feared by opponents of this action. The pros and cons of the move had been heatedly debated by all factions, political and otherwise. Supporters of the move claimed that it would shorten the war, while their opponents saw it as a further prolongation. In the final analysis public opinion as far as it manifested itself appeared to be in favour of the all-out Einsatz of the submarines, perhaps arising out of an "all or nothing" fatalism or from the feeling that wars have to be fought with all means available and therefore "all is fair".¹⁹ *

*For a more detailed analysis of the pros and cons of the

Also according to Thimme's rationalization, the all-out U-Boot Krieg was not so much an effort on behalf of Germany to reach a favourable phase in the war, but rather a reaction to the Entente's efforts to win against Germany, thus "forcing" her into a position where she had to defend herself at all costs and with all the available means at her disposal.²⁰ With this type of logic reigning in leading intellectual circles it was little wonder that public reaction to Wilson's peace proposals was decidedly negative and had reached a stage where a majority of the population felt that the submarine campaign, rather than weakening, was actually strengthening Germany's moral position among the neutrals. The success of the campaign was also made palatable by the incredibly high tonnages that were being publicized as the U-Boats' shares in the battle against Britain. At first, probably because of a lack of concrete information, but later on as a deliberate attempt to deceive the public, the Reichsmarine Amt proceeded to prove mathematically, through the use of inflated figures, that the Entente powers were losing ships at a greater rate than they could replace them, and consequently would soon have to cease hostilities. By these last and desperate measures it was hoped that the tide could be changed before the U. S. entry into the war; a prospect the Germans felt would be less likely to occur if England were defeated quickly, thus depriving the Americans of their cause célèbre.^{21 *}

U-Boot debate see Baldur Kaulich, "Die Auseinandersetzungen über den uneingeschränkten U-Bootkrieg innerhalb der herrschenden Klassen im zweiten Halbjahr 1916 und seine Eröffnung im Februar 1917." In Politik im Krieg 1914-1918. Fritz Klein, ed. (Akademie-Verlag, Berlin, 1964).

*Annelise Thimme in Hans Delbrück als Kritiker der Wilhelminischen Epoche, states that the falsified figures raised hopes of victory among the public and made the U-Boats the most popular weapons of the war, p. 133.

Thimme's own part in this episode especially his article, Wilson's Fiasko must be judged much more severely than any of his other writings on the internal problems. In this attempt he was as blatantly pro-war, and pro-submarines, as the most rabid naval adherent. If this is combined with his vast insight into the complex problems surrounding this desperate solution, one cannot escape the feeling that he was playing a deliberate part in preparing the public and the nation for the eventual entry of the United States into the war against Germany.* Judging from his phrases and the deliberate and carefully worded statements that he employed, there can be little doubt that in his own mind he had all but accepted the inevitability of the United States' entry into the conflict yet he continued to exhort the nation with " . . . es gibt nur ein Vorwärts auf der nun einmal betretenen Bahn!"²² Parallel to laying the psychological groundwork for an expanded war, he cautioned again, that only unity would lead to victory, whereas division would result in certain failure, thus unwittingly preparing the ground for the later explanation of the defeat.²³

When the United States did enter the war on the Entente side in April of 1917, his reaction to it was devoid of surprise, rather he saw it as a vindication of his own position. To him the entry indicated the desperation of the other side, brought about by the possibility of a separate peace between Russia and Germany.²⁴ Whether or not this was a deliberate self delusion or a conscious belief even at this late date in the superiority of the German position, both morally and materially, is difficult to ascertain. Certainly Thimme could not

*See Annelise Thimme, Hans Delbrück, "Über den zu erwartenden Kriegseintritt Amerikas, . . . ging man geradezu mit einer hybriden Leichtfertigkeit hinweg.", pp. 134-135.

have been deceived enough at this time, not to be aware of the reverses the nation had suffered, especially during the previous winter, and he was also astute enough to see beyond the "next time for sure" syndrome which kept alive the hopes for victory. Over the years of course his persistence and almost evangelical belief in victory was not only effective, it was also a self-nourishing psychosis. The raison d'etre for victory were not the goals of 1914 anymore, rather victory itself; victory at any cost; at any time; as long as it was a German victory, so that German culture, German militarism and German superiority would be vindicated in spite of itself. Of course the war had also reached a stage by this time where a reversal of positions was impossible. Leading men were aware of the Damocles sword hanging over their country, aware that if they lost, far more than a battle would be lost, but rather that an era and a way of life would be terminated. It was for this reason perhaps that men like Thimme clung to the myth and belief in the final victory, not because they thought it necessarily just, or the wisest course to follow, but because to them it meant self-preservation, not on a physical but on a spiritual plane. They could not afford to give up hope, or forego a belief in victory, nor could they indulge in thoughts of defeat, for what was at stake here was everything since 1870 had been a prelude towards the glorification of Germany and its hegemony, which was to have its reward in 1914. Anything else was unthinkable and too horrible to contemplate even in ones private moments, or within a closed circle of friends. And so the charade was carried on, both for public consumption and private sanity.

To perpetuate this feeling, and to disallow any division from

arising within, Thimme took it upon himself to try and stabilize the increasingly turbulent internal political situation. The Chancellor's speech in May of 1917 promising voting reforms in Prussia, and hopefully later in the Reich, was designed to placate the Social Democratic Party and predictably enough drew the immediate ire of the right, especially that of the leader of the Conservative Party, (Ernst von Heydebrand und der Lase). Bethmann Hollweg's promise had opened the avenue for the conservatives, through which they could display their dissatisfaction with the present government leadership, and it provided them with a means by which they could question the lack of progress in the war. Whereas the voting reforms were nothing but the end result of an earlier promise made to the "left" in 1914, and in effect were to be a form of payment for their services, their loyalty, and their blood, the conservatives used the proposed reforms as a starting point in their campaign to remove the Chancellor, ostensibly for what they felt to be his dangerous collusion with the Social Democratic Party, his waverings in his determination to win the war, and the complete radicalization of his policies towards the left.²⁵

In a series of articles entitled "Offene Briefe an Herrn von Heydebrand und der Lase" published serially in Die Grenzboten Thimme took the conservatives and their leader to task for what he considered to be their determined effort to undermine the national cause and the public will to fight.²⁶ In three letters he castigated Heydebrand for his attacks upon the Chancellor, attacks which he claimed would undermine Germany's position rather than strengthen it as the conservatives in their desire for a new Chancellor claimed it would. Because the U-Boot campaign had been a less than a qualified success two

months after its inception, Thimme was increasingly doubtful about the claims of the war hawks who continued to insist that it would be. It struck him as utter foolishness that the conservatives refused to give some recognition to the Chancellor's search for viable alternatives. It was already obvious that England would not be forced to her knees in the next few months and thus it was even more imperative that the Chancellor should make every attempt to find some other solution. This did not mean that his actions should be interpreted as the vacillations of a weak statesman, as the conservatives claimed, but rather as the actions of a sound politician who covers all bets and tries to take opportunity of every situation.²⁷ Secondly he took the conservatives to task for once again trying their best to revive the factionalism amongst the parties which had existed prior to the Kaiser's speech of August 1914, wherein the latter disclaimed all parties, stating that henceforth he recognized only Germans. He further pointed to the Emperor's promise of Easter 1916, where he had projected equal voting rights, and equal political standing among all parties, for the near future. In the light of these statements Thimme found it difficult to reconcile the conservative position in 1917, when as the avowed pro-monarchist party they were actually agitating against the Monarch's pronouncements on the very points, of which they attempted to make an issue. In effect he accused them of breaking with tradition and with the Monarchy by attempting to negate the King's efforts at maintaining the internal stability.* At this stage, Thimme for perhaps the

*"Ihre Politik bedeutet aber auch Bruch mit der Monarchie." Die Grenzboten "Zweiter Brief", p. 325. On p. 327 quoting Wallbaum, he continued, "Wer die Einigkeit des Volkes störe das Vertrauen zur Regierung untergrabe, der versündige sich am Deutschen Volk und seiner Zukunft."

only time in his life was closer to the Socialist position than his normal political and social outlook would have permitted him to be otherwise.²⁸ Any criticism of the Chancellor, he stated, must of necessity also be a criticism of the Kaiser, because the former was only an appointee of the latter, and as such any move against him, must be seen as a move against the crown. Hence, the conservative position was far more treacherous in its implications than anything the Social Democratic Party or the Chancellor himself had ever contrived to do in the past three years. Thimme's attack on the conservatives had repercussions far beyond his expectations. He was made aware that his exchanges had been brought to the attention of the Kaiser, who judging by the information that filtered down to Thimme, apparently agreed with him on all points. Secondly, in the Chancellor's opinion, as reported to Thimme, his attacks had at least temporarily saved the internal situation and negated Heydebrand's attempts at reshuffling the power structure. As Thimme himself put it, " . . . kleine Ursachen, grosse Wirkungen".²⁹

Despite his careful analysis of the internal situation, Thimme nevertheless overestimated Bethmann's position vis-à-vis the Kaiser and the Army High Command. At the same time he underestimated the power of the conservatives, and the success of their campaign which was designed to undermine public confidence in the Chancellor.³⁰ True his articles led to a temporary reprieve in the whole situation, but within a few months time Bethmann Hollweg was to resign and the conservative viewpoint carried the day.

On the personal side his political attacks brought him into difficulties with his superior, the President of the Upper House, who

objected to Thimme's extracurricular activities, especially in view of the fact that Thimme as a public servant had attacked members of the institution which ultimately provided his livelihood.* However, since the Emperor had given tacit approval to the contents of the articles and their political direction, Thimme had little to fear from his opponents, official or otherwise, with the possible exception that Heydebrand could demand personal satisfaction, a prospect which undoubtedly raised Thimme's spirits rather than diminishing them.³¹ Far more important however, were the attacks directed against him in the conservative press, mainly in the Kreuzzeitung. Thimme saw these altercations as a vindication of his own position, since he judged correctly that such a vehement response could only be elicited by the fact that he had hit upon some Achilles heel within the conservative ranks, and as a result they were now hard pressed to justify their own position. Most of the reaction outside the conservative circles appeared to have been favourable towards his position, and certainly he was convinced that they had definitely found a favourable response at the highest level, for time and time again he received assurances to this effect from many quarters. Certainly he could be justified in his belief

* Annelise Thimme, in Flucht in den Mythos (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen, 1969) states, "unbeschadet der Tatsache, dass der Verfasser dieser Briefe Direktor der Herrenhausbibliothek war, nannte er das Mitglied dieses 'hohen Hauses' nicht den Führer, sondern den 'Totengräber' seiner Partei, ein Wort, für das der Präsident des Herrenhauses den respektlosen Beamten gern zur Rechenschaft gezogen hätte. Dieser war indessen flinker gewesen und hatte zu der bestellten Unterredung ein Schreiben des preussischen Ministerpräsidenten und Reichskanzlers mitgebracht, das nicht nur dessen, sondern auch die volle Zustimmung Seiner Majestät des Königs von Preussen und Deutschen Kaisers zum Ausdruck brachte. Erst als der Präsident von diesem 'allerhöchsten' moralischen Rückhalt erfuhr, durfte sich der fünfzigjährige Beamte setzen.", pp. 10-11.

that for the time being at least he had done his share and a major one at that to maintain internal order, if not peace.³² *

However, his expectations were to be of a short duration. In the middle of July, Bethmann Hollweg handed in his resignation as Chancellor, after considerable pressure had been brought to bear upon him by the Army High Command, especially by Ludendorff, who threatened to resign unless Bethmann quit his post.** This was to be only the first of a series of false predictions that Thimme made in regards to the future of the parliamentary system in Germany, and its possible evolution. A few months earlier he had written, "Aber bei uns wird der Krieg die Krone nicht wegfeigen", in reference to events in Russia, because to him Kaisertum and Democracy were not antithetical, but rather complimentary forms of government and it appeared to him that one was unworkable without the other.³³ Similarly, a change of Chancellors had appeared to be beyond the realm of possibilities only a short time ago, and yet it had taken place swiftly and peacefully without the great upheaval which had been expected if such an event were ever to occur during the war. Thimme, to his credit remained unconvinced of the failures which were attributed to Bethmann Hollweg, and he launched a vigorous defense of the man and his policies in the face of what amounted to unanimous opposition from the conservative

*" . . . das Bewusstsein, eine immerhin weitreichende Wirksamkeit ausüben." Letter to Emma (undated but around June/July 1917).

** For this episode see Ursachen und Folgen. Vom deutschen Zusammenbruch 1918 und 1945 bis zur staatlichen Neuordnung Deutschlands in der Gegenwart, H. Michaelis, E. Schraepfer, G. Scheel, eds., (Dokumenten-Verlag, Dr. Herbert Wendler & Co., Berlin, 1958), Vol. I., pp. 446-452.

parties, especially from the Kreuzzeitung and Deutsche Tageszeitung. In his estimation Bethmann Hollweg's policies had been the correct ones under the circumstances and in fact had been the only viable ones at the time. If the Chancellor could be faulted, it would have to be with respect to his U-Boot campaign, which in Thimme's estimation, he had not pursued vigorously enough. On the other hand Thimme raised the point, that on the submarine decision, Bethmann had had the tacit support of the OHL though the general public as well as most officials and politicians were unaware of this. At any rate he was correct in his assumption that the new Chancellor Michaelis would have little alternative but to continue Bethmann's policies, however reluctantly, because they represented the only possible course of action. In view of this it was conceivable that the confrontation with the conservatives would continue, though a temporary cease-fire had been arranged.³⁴

The most immediate problem as Thimme saw it at the time would be the effect the Kanzlerwechsel would have on Germany's enemies. The facade of internal unity, party-peace, and the myth of a united front against the outside, had obviously been destroyed before the eyes of the world. This now left Germany in the same moral position as her opponents, in other words, three years of propaganda concerning internal unity had now been wasted, and spiritually she was now no further ahead than before the outbreak of hostilities. It was therefore essential he felt, to restore confidence in the leadership of the country as fast as possible, before the majority of the population had time to think about the repercussions this may have, and before they realized that they had been led by myths, over these past years.³⁵ While his advice on how to cope with the immediate problems was sound, and was guaranteed

to cause the least amount of disturbances and questions, it was another problem how the men who had helped to perpetuate these myths would now relate to the new situation. Would they now concede that the Burgfrieden had been a facade, which had been upheld at all costs, or had they really believed in the status quo among the parties, in its permanence, in its limitless possibilities and in its apparent benefits for the nation in the post-war era. With Thimme this was no easy task. It would be naive to assume, that he had swallowed every statement about the Burgfrieden or indeed believed in everything bandied about by the parties, regarding their attitudes towards one another, and the war. He was much too well informed, and too deeply involved in everyday events and politics, to be taken in by plethora of words that were fed to the nation at large. Yet it would also be false to assume that Thimme was callous or career-minded enough to only put forth his hopes on "Internal Peace" in order to advance his career, or to play a deliberate part in deceiving the public. He would never have lent his pen or his name to anything that smacked of deliberate deception however small, and the possibility of him having consciously partaken in a three year fraud can be discounted. This can only lead to one conclusion. Thimme was aware of the subteranean difficulties that beset the Burgfrieden and was under no illusion as to its permanence, should the war end suddenly. However, he strongly believed in the possibilities this party-peace offered. To him it was a unique opportunity, the first since the founding of the Reich, to completely revamp the party system in Germany, to close the gap between social classes and to truly make it a participatory form of government for every segment of society. As such he viewed the war as the vehicle to bring about

these changes, a God given opportunity which might not return again and such had to be taken advantage of now. He therefore did his utmost to bring about a rapprochement between the Socialists and the Conservatives, often earning scorn from both sides, and quite frequently pleasing no one. However, he believed in the future possibilities of the Burgfrieden and what it could mean for the nation's democratic and social development if it could be made to last beyond the period where it was a necessity because of duress. And it was with this future in mind that he wrote and published, often with an idealistic theme in mind, but always realistic enough in his aims to see that what he advocated in terms of internal reform, was not unattainable, but rather possible. The possibilities that he advocated rested on the assumption that both sides in the political struggle would modify their rigid positions and recognize the fact that they were all Germans, and that they all wanted a better fatherland.

It is thus easy to understand his disenchantment with the new government and especially the strife which now openly haunted the halls of the Reichstag after a brief honeymoon period for the new Chancellor.³⁶ Thimme's own views on what was happening and what measures should be taken to stop the Selbstzerfleischung (self-destruction) of the German parliamentary system were put forth in a sequel to his earlier article on the Innere Frieden except that this time he quite blatantly called it Vom inneren Unfrieden des deutschen Volkes. Herein he reiterated his ideas that the cessation of the "internal peace" had now become one of the biggest obstacles for the speedy and victorious conclusion of the war. Nothing he felt could be worse for the army and for all those at the front, than the knowledge and realization that hate, doubt

and strife existed among the leading men at home. The outcome of the war, he felt, would be decided by this issue and by the success or failure of the attempts to rectify it.* Yet at the moment he foresaw little possibility for an early settlement of the dispute at home. The discussion of war aims, peace proposals, and plans for the internal political reorientation, were hardly conducive to a more equitable political climate, and the friction between left and right was increasing rather than decreasing as the situation demanded it. The hatred on the political scene was such that personal attacks were now being made daily upon one side or another and while most of it was centered on the ex-Chancellor, even the new one did not escape continued criticism and attacks on his character and capabilities, despite the fact that he had only recently attained his position. Thimme's prognosis for the future was one of gloom. Unless Michaelis found some way to re-unite the warring factions he saw little hope for the future, and concluded, our greatest weakness is our disunity.³⁷

The tragedy of a divided and warring Germany struck him more acutely when he discussed the accomplishments that an internally stabilized Germany could have achieved. Thimme elucidated on this point in a reply to a letter sent to the editor of the Deutsche Politik to which he was a regular contributor. The letter came from the front trenches and obviously attempted to put forth what many men in the trenches must have felt with regards to the goals for which they were fighting. A nagging doubt about the aims set forth and

* Here for the first time he speaks of the home front as being responsible for the failures of the front. "In den Rücken der Armee gefallen." and thus starts his own Dolchstoßlegende.

about the leadership provided at home permeates its pages.* It was left to Thimme to provide an answer and to make it convincing enough to uphold morale, and at the same time enunciate his own views of the future and the aims which underlay the present struggle.³⁸ In his reply he spoke of the great goal of Germany's future of the desire to be a Weltvolk which would be a leader in both the political and intellectual development of western society. This he stated cannot be achieved if Germany slavishly continues to imitate the decadent forms of western society, or the parliamentary systems of England and France. Such imitation he felt would condemn Germany to impotence. It was therefore imperative to stop the intra-party feuding in order to achieve these lofty goals. Only a strong or strengthened Monarchy could lead Germany to greatness, he wrote, and " . . . wir hegen . . . mit ihnen (die Hoffnung), dass wir Deutsche dazu berufen seien, neue Formen, deutsche Methoden der Volksregierung zu finden, zu entwickeln, zu gestalten., . . . es gilt doch nicht bloss den Krieg siegreich zu beenden, nicht bloss den Frieden zu schliessen, es gilt auch jetzt schon, aus unserem eigensten Wesen heraus für den deutschen Volkstaat die Formen zu schaffen."³⁹ Truly these were not the words of a democrat or egalitarian and they were strangely anticipatory of similar phrases which were to be heard in Germany twenty-five years later. Yet at this time they were noble ideals indeed and Thimme's Weltvolk must not be confused with the later concept of Herrenvolk although both terms

*Erich Eyck in A History of the Weimar Republic also states that "The real sentiments of the millions of conscripts and reservists who filled their divisions were practically unknown to them; they were certainly less known to the generals than to the people at home, to whom the soldiers bared their hearts . . . ", Vol. I., p. 39.

had high expectations from German supremacy in all fields.*

Much to Thimme's chagrin these lofty and idealistic sentiments as to the "true" aims and purposes of the war were not shared by everyone. In fact he increasingly found that his own ideals often were further and further removed from that of the official conservative position and much more in line with the so-called left, in this case the Social Democrats. In fact, often it was difficult to distinguish whom he despised more, those who advocated the abolishment of the Monarchy or those who in the name of the Crown went to extremism in the political arena. It was in this vein that he attacked the extreme right-wing Vaterlandspartei, led by Dr. Wolfgang Kapp of later Kapp-putsch fame. He questioned their loyalty and indeed their suitability to the German political scene. He was particularly incensed by their calls for unity while indulging in vituperative attacks upon the Social Democratic Party, because the latter were demanding democratic reforms, "Sie (the Vaterlandspartei) wollen Deutschlands Rettung, Ehre und Zukunft, und sind auf dem besten Wege, uns alles zu verderben", because of their reactionary policies and opposition to internal reforms.⁴⁰

Thimme warned against what he called Vogelstrausspolitik, a policy of reaction, which failed to take into account changing circumstances both at home and at the front, and he concluded that a clear and goal conscious reform program would do much to restore morale. On the other hand a maintenance of the status quo or even a regression à la Kapp, especially prior to another harsh and difficult winter, would undermine

* Hans Delbrück had similar visions of a future political re-orientation and re-culturation especially in the eastern countries and the Baltic states. See Annelise Thimme, Hans Delbrück, pp. 129-133.

morale and confidence, to the detriment of all.⁴¹

It is therefore easily discernable why he was elated over the codification of the Würzburg Parteitag of the Social Democratic Party and the positive approach the Party had shown in its support of the national goals.* To him the Würzburg program demonstrated the great future in store for the Social Democratic Party and the control and discipline existent within the Party, qualities which he now found lacking within most of the other parties and especially in the Reichstag.⁴² The Parteitag was a conscious attempt to demonstrate to the nation once and for all that the Social Democratic Party belonged to the State, supported the State and would continue to fight for the State, while also sharing in the responsibilities of its administration. It further ascertained that Alsace-Lorraine was non-negotiable, as was the Belgian problem; at the same time the non-realignment of Germany's present borders was to be self-understood. The Social Democratic Party further showed itself willing to vote on further war credits as long as they were used for defensive purposes only, a term which was probably devoid of any precise meaning either to the Social Democratic Party or the government. This, notwithstanding their goals and aspirations closely coincided with those of the Conservatives, except the extreme elements, and it is little wonder

*The Würzburg Parteitag was held on October 14-20, 1917, and attempted to reformulate the aims of the Social Democrats especially in view of the fact that part of their caucus had earlier broken away under the leadership of Liebknecht and Haase to form the Independent Socialists (USPD), an extreme left of center faction. The Parteitag reaffirmed the SPD's support of the present Reich policies and expressed its faith in the Party leaders Scheidemann and Ebert, i.e. reaffirmation of the resolution of August 4, 1914.

that Thimme was moved to write in terms of a new epoch having arrived for Germany's Socialists and consequently for the other parties as well. He saw the Social Democratic Party position as a complete volte face away from revolutionary tactics and aims, and was especially pleased with Scheidemann's prognosis for post-war developments.⁴³ The important element here, as Thimme was quick to point out, was the fact that the Social Democratic Party, despite internal party problems and difficulties with the other parties, was willing to sacrifice some of its own ideology in order to preserve unity at home. The same of course could not be said for the parties of the extreme right. However, in order to facilitate these plans, there had to be reciprocal action from the government side (i.e. no more talk or plans about conquered territories) in order to allow the Social Democratic Party room to manoeuvre within their own guidelines and convictions. Thimme assumed that if they were to be met halfway there would be no need to resort to political blackmail, a move which other parties had successfully employed in the past, but to which the Social Democratic Party had not yet resorted. Therefore if their conditions were met they would vote on the war credits and even support the Chancellor.⁴⁴ But Thimme was wrong as post-1918 events demonstrated, in his own prognosis about the Social Democratic Party's future, "Die hunderttausende von Sozialdemokraten, die ihre Treue für das Vaterland mit ihrem Blut besiegelt haben, werden der Partei nicht verloren sein. Sie sichern über ihren Tod hinaus für alle Zeiten ihre Partei vor dem Vorwurf der Vaterlandsfeindlichkeit."⁴⁵ The curious fact here, of course, is that such an idea as Vaterlandsfeindlichkeit even had to be refuted as being a condition afflicting the Social Democratic Party. After all, no one

had even considered the possibility of attaching such a label to the Conservatives. The fact was, that the seeds of mistrust had already flourished and scapegoats were being sought and readied, to explain the failures of the past and perhaps to explain the biggest failure which as yet lay in the future but which the more discernable could faintly see, without however, admitting to its possibility. That a man like Thimme felt compelled to make a statement vouching for the patriotism of the Social Democratic Party can only be explained by the fact that to many it was not self-evident, and he recognized this and saw the inherent dangers. He was also aware that many refused to recognize it on principle, refusing to accept the possibility that there could be patriots who did not feel the necessity to shout this fact from the roof tops as "true" patriots supposedly should.*

In November 1917, Chancellor Michaelis handed in his resignation, and for a time, hopes for a renewed Burgfrieden ran high. The new Chancellor was Graf Hertling, who proceeded to appoint a new cabinet out of a coalition of the Center Party, the National Liberals and the Progressive People's Party, a left of center faction. The Social Democratic Party had been offered participation in the new cabinet, but had declined, preferring instead to throw their support behind the Progressive Party, thus assuring that a majority coalition would be effective, without compromising their own position.** The new government pledged itself to work towards voting reforms, the removal

* Erich Eyck in A History of the Weimar Republic also states that "Only a Conservative was considered really Kaisertreu.", Vol. I, p. 3.

** See Erich Eyck A History of the Weimar Republic for details of the cabinet shuffle and party alignments. Vol. I, pp. 20-24.

of political censorship, abolition of the three class vote system in Prussia, and promised to redefine the power base between civil and military administration.⁴⁶

Thimme's expectations were therefore high, that a united front could once again be established with the avowed purpose of defeating the enemy beyond the borders of the Reich. This internal revamping appeared to him to be the ideal solution because as he noted at the time, "Mehr wie je ist offenbar geworden, dass unser Durchhalten im Weltkrieg, unser Sieg abhängig ist von den seelischen Kräften unserer Äusseren und inneren Front". And nothing he continued, had weakened morale as much as the continual strife and division which had marked our political situation in the past four years.⁴⁷ With the passing of the crisis it appeared as if it was incumbent upon the Reichstag and the majority parties to take "opportunity by the horns" and through their decisive action and leadership bring about victory. If victory eluded them this time the implication appeared to be, then one would at least know where to look for the guilty parties; not at the front, but at home.

There was still no doubt as far as Thimme was concerned as to the moral position of Germany in this war. At this stage he did not believe it to be any less just than it had been three years ago, in fact the possibility of a military failure did not appear to have entered his mind. All his queries of the past, his objections and corrections, had been directed against the political structure, which he held responsible for the successes and failures, and there appeared to be an implicit trust towards the OHL leadership. Whether this was deliberate on his part, arising out of fears of censorship, or whether

in fact he did not trust his military and strategic expertise enough to voice criticism and thus left the job to the professionals is difficult to ascertain. Certainly there are many references in his correspondence, to individual actions, to leading military figures and to the situation at the front in general, but it is usually a dispassionate analysis of existing circumstances, rather than a critical evaluation. His military sang froid could be construed as deliberate enough to act as a counterbalance to his passionate political involvement and thereby provide some stabilizing effect.

Hertling's appointment did indeed raise hopes in political circles.* His capacities for reconciliation were recognized widely, and his self-imposed guidelines of "Abwarten, Ausharren, Durchhalten" appeared to be exactly what Germany needed most at the moment, a time for re-evaluation and perhaps a new direction.⁴⁸ It was also widely believed that Hertling would be the man who could reconcile the differences between Kriegsziele and Friedensziele and arrive at an honorable peace without losing face at home or abroad. All these qualities were only realizable because Hertling's power base had been broadened considerably over those of Michaelis, and his appointment had come about in liaison between parliament and government, in this case the Kaiser, a step which broke with tradition and was of far reaching implications for the Crown.⁴⁹ Hertling's appointment was to be the

* Klaus Epstein in Matthias Erzberger and the Dilemma of German Democracy (Princeton University Press, 1959) calls the appointment of "a deeply pious Catholic to Bismarck's office . . . a great political innovation;" p. 225. For a further discussion on Hertling's appointment, on his views and attitudes see also Klaus Epstein "Wrong Man in a Maelstrom: the Government of Max of Baden". Review of Politics (Number 26, 1964), pp. 219-221.

the first in a series of steps leading to parliamentary democracy. However, many recognized it as a case of too little; too late. The niceties of parliamentary democracy, however, held little fascination for Thimme at the moment. What he was concerned about, was the formation of a government that had majority support and would be able to use this support to elicit maximum effort from the nation towards the goal of ending the war speedily and hopefully victoriously.⁵⁰ The one concession he did make towards the obvious change in the parliamentary procedure was to view the appointment of Hertling not as a victory for democracy and parliamentary rule, but as an action by the Kaiser " . . . mit einer Selbstverleugnung, die ihm zur höchsten Ehre angerechnet werden muss . . . " ; in other words, the Kaiser by suffering to let himself be guided in the appointment had done more for the Reich, than parliament had by choosing a capable Chancellor.⁵¹ In this line of thought he was supported by the Conservatives who viewed Hertling's appointment as a usurpation of the monarchical rights and a poor example for the future. On the other hand, while the Conservatives mistrusted Hertling's Bavarian Catholic background, Thimme saw it as a bond between north and south, a bond which would strengthen the traditionally hostile camps within the Reich and would hopefully lead to a more confessional peaceful understanding.⁵²

Not entirely content with the organic development of Germany's political maturation, Thimme had taken steps to at least prevent any regression towards the pre-1914 domination of politics by the conservative elements. In October of 1917 he started to organize a Volksbund für Freiheit und Vaterland an attempt to counterbalance the extreme

right-wing Vaterlandspartei.* Optimistically he hoped for an initial membership of eight million followers, a figure which if correct, would have made it an instant political force to be reckoned with, especially since he counted on including all of organized labour.⁵³ The ultimate success of the scheme was doubtful at best, and its goals were nebulous from the beginning, perhaps deliberately so, because there were already far too many fixed and intractable positions which had led up to the recurring crisis. However, despite its relegation to instant oblivion, the idea behind the scheme only served to underline the transformation that Thimme himself and undergone during the war years. From a dispassionate non-political civil servant who had cared or concerned himself little with party politics, he had matured into a full-fledged political manipulator who more and more became directly involved in the political manoeuvring of the home front and whose written commentaries were listened to, debated, and taken issue with, and often adhered to. He may thus be forgiven, if either through frustration, or a feeling of political and perhaps intellectual maturity or superiority, he attempted to influence the course of events even more through the formulation of his own political cadres. Certainly his ideas were no worse than most of those being put into practice every

*See Annelise Thimme Hans Delbrück, "Obwohl der Volksbund zahlenmässig der 'Deutschen Vaterlandspartei' sehr überlegen war, hat er doch weit weniger Wirkungen ausgeübt als diese. Er war die Organisation einiger klar denkender Intellektueller und Gewerkschaftsführer, die mit der Idee des Verständigungsfriedens ein Mass von Einsicht und Vernunft verlangten, das von einem grossen Teil des Bürgertums nicht aufgebracht wurde.", pp. 121-122. A. Thimme quotes the membership figures of the Vaterlandspartei as 1.25 million, those of the Volksbund as being 4 million. See above volume, p. 121.

day during the period under discussion, and in many ways he was far ahead of his peers in his views on the democratization of Germany, and in the realization for the need of social reforms. Therefore his attempts at political control through the Volksbund must be seen as a plus for his personal integrity and the success or failure of the movement does not detract from the nobility of his thoughts behind the attempt. Certainly he was not out for personal gain of self-glory, nor was he a political missionary in the usual sense bent on proselytizing a new gospel. He simply wanted to help the fatherland in every way possible, and the failure of the other parties only strengthened his resolve to beat them, rather than to throw up his hands and quit in disgust.

FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER III

¹Thimme papers (unpublished letters 1914-1918) Friedrich Thimme to Emma Thimme 16.6.1916, pp. 2-3.

²Friedrich Thimme, Vom inneren Frieden des deutschen Volkes (Hirtschel Verlag, Leipzig, 1916), p. V. (from Introduction).

³Thimme papers (unpublished letters 1914-1918) Friedrich Thimme to Emma Thimme 27.6.1916.

⁴Ibid., pp. 1-2.

⁵Friedrich Thimme, Vom inneren Frieden, p. 563.

⁶Ibid., pp. 566-567, and pp. 570-572.

⁷Ibid., pp. 568-570.

⁸Ibid., pp. 571-572.

⁹Ibid., p. 574.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 470.

¹¹Ibid., p. 574.

¹²Friedrich Thimme, "Siegen, Siegen, Siegen," Die Grenzboten, No. 3, 17.1.1917, p. 65.

¹³Ibid., pp. 65-66.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 66.

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 69-70.

¹⁶Thimme papers (unpublished letters 1914-1918) Friedrich Thimme to Wilhelm Thimme 13.1.1917, p. 1.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 2.

¹⁸Ibid., Friedrich Thimme to Wilhelm Thimme, January 1917 (no exact date).

¹⁹Friedrich Thimme, "U-Bootkrieg und innere Frieden", Deutsche Politik, No. 6, 9.2.1917, p. 173.

²⁰Friedrich Thimme, "Wilson's Fiasko", Die Grenzboten, No. 7, 14.2.1917, pp. 193-194.

²¹Ibid., pp. 196-197.

²²Ibid., p. 197.

²³Ibid., p. 198.

²⁴Thimme papers (unpublished letters 1914-1918), Friedrich Thimme to Wilhelm Thimme 8.4.1917, p. 2.

²⁵Friedrich Thimme, "Die Pforte zur Wahlrechtsreform in Preussen" Die Grenzboten, No. 14, 4.4.1917, pp. 11-14.

²⁶This is in reference to three open letters addressed to Herrn von Heydebrand und der Lase, leader of the Conservatives in the Reichstag. Thimme published the letters in three consecutive issues of Die Grenzboten, No. 23, June 6, No. 24, June 13, and No. 25, June 20, 1917.

²⁷Friedrich Thimme, "Offener Brief an Herrn von Heydebrand und der Lase", Die Grenzboten, No. 23, 6.6.1917, pp. 291-292.

²⁸Friedrich Thimme, "Zweiter offener Brief an Herrn von Heydebrand und der Lase", Die Grenzboten, No. 24, 13.6.1917, pp. 323-325.

²⁹Thimme papers (unpublished letters 1914-1918) Friedrich Thimme to Emma Thimme 18.6.1917, p. 1., see also Friedrich Thimme to Wilhelm Thimme 24.6.1917.

³⁰Friedrich Thimme, "Dritter offener Brief an Herrn von Heydebrand und der Lase", Die Grenzboten, No. 25, 20.6.1917, pp. 359-360.

³¹Thimme papers (unpublished letters 1914-1918) Friedrich Thimme to Emma Thimme (no date given, but probably around the end of June 1917). In his youth Thimme had been an avid fencer and had partaken in a number of duels, the results of which he bore as visible scars on his face.

³²Ibid., Friedrich Thimme to Wilhelm Thimme 24.6.1917.

³³Friedrich Thimme, "Krone und Parlament", Deutsche Politik, No. 16, 20.4.1917, pp. 504-505.

³⁴Thimme papers (unpublished letters 1914-1918) Friedrich Thimme to Wilhelm Thimme (July or August 1917), p. 1.

³⁵Friedrich Thimme, "Der Kanzlerwechsel", Deutsche Politik, No. 30, 27.7.1917, p. 948.

³⁶Thimme papers (unpublished letters 1914-1918) Friedrich Thimme to Wilhelm Thimme 20.10.1917.

³⁷Friedrich Thimme, "Vom inneren Unfrieden des deutschen Volkes" Deutsche Politik, No. 37, 14.9.1917, pp. 1174-1180. See also Friedrich Thimme, "Die Regierungskrise", Die Grenzboten, No. 43, 24.10.1917, pp. 97-98.

³⁸Friedrich Thimme, "Offener Brief" and "Antwort", Deutsche Politik, No. 38, 21.9.1917, pp. 1218-1223.

³⁹Ibid., pp. 1220-1222.

⁴⁰Friedrich Thimme, "Vaterlandspartei und innere Reformen", Deutsche Politik, No. 40, 5.10.1917, p. 1274.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 1272 and p. 1277.

⁴²Friedrich Thimme, "Würzburg", Deutsche Politik, No. 43, 26.10.1917, pp. 1423-1427.

⁴³Friedrich Thimme, "Der Würzburger Parteitag", Die Grenzboten, No. 44, 31.10.1917, pp. 130-134.

⁴⁴Ibid., pp. 133-134.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 129, (italics mine).

⁴⁶Friedrich Thimme, "Zur neuen Reichstagung", Deutsche Politik, No. 48, 30.11.1917, pp. 1529-1530.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 1532. See also Friedrich Thimme, "Graf Hertlings Debut", Deutsche Politik, No. 50, 14.12.1917, p. 1595.

⁴⁸Friedrich Thimme, "Graf Hertlings Debüt", Deutsche Politik, No. 50, 14.12.1917, p. 1595.

⁴⁹Friedrich Thimme, "Der siebente Kanzler", Die Grenzboten, No. 45, 8.11.1917, p. 179. See also Friedrich Thimme, "Die Reform des preussischen Landtags", Annalen für Soziale Politik und Gesetzgebung, Sonderabdruck aus Band 5., Heft 4/6 December 1917, p. 519.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 180.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 180.

⁵²Ibid., pp. 181-182.

⁵³Thimme papers (unpublished letters 1914-1918), Friedrich Thimme to Wilhelm Thimme, October 1917.

CHAPTER IV

THE ROAD TO DEFEAT

Wir wollen uns vielmehr freuen, dass das Verhältniß zwischen Krone, Parlament und Volk, wie es bei uns bestand, trotz aller seiner Schwächen und Unvollkommenheit uns befähigt hat, einer Welt von Feinden siegreich zu widerstehen.

(Friedrich Thimme in:
Krone und Parlament 1917)

While he was thus engaged in a struggle with his political conscience, events in the winter of 1917-18 were taking a dramatic turn within Germany. On January 28th, a munitions strike had started in Berlin, and the implications of this were enormous both for morale and for the war effort. If it were to spread to other areas of the Reich and other industries no one could foretell what this would do to the front lines. Behind the strike lay the general political unrest of the workers, brought about by unkept promises of political reform and the general dissatisfaction with the course of the war and especially with the slow progress of the negotiations at Brest-Litovsk. Secondly the working population as no other segment in the Reich had suffered years of privations, and were now faced with the prospect of another winter of severe food shortages. Bread and flour had already been rationed, and other products when available were often distributed unevenly, often to a privileged few, or else if available to the working classes, were accompanied by high prices (Wucherei) or only on the black market. Coupled with political censorship which was also unevenly applied, thus allowing the Vaterlandspartei all sorts of press privileges while denying the same latitude to the Social Democratic Party (militärische Bevorzugtheit) only added to the general feeling

of discontent as the war entered its fourth winter. Thimme was sympathetic to the workers cause and realized that many of their complaints were legitimate and just. He was also aware that the strike was almost inevitable in view of their past treatment and the continued high losses that their segment suffered as a direct result of the war. Proportionately the losses of the working class was higher than that of any other group, with no end in sight yet. This did not prevent him however, from venting his anger at the strikers ". . . die ganze Torheit eines Friedenstreikes im Kriege . . . sie erreichen in ihrem Irrwahn bloß die Verlängerung des Krieges . . . ", and from his point of view his reasoning was correct.¹ However, the difference lay in the fact that Thimme was operating on the firm conviction that Germany could still emerge victoriously and therefore any weakening of the war effort would only remove this possibility into the future. The strikers on the other hand had reached the position where they cared little about winning or losing, as long as the war was brought to a speedy conclusion. Thus the clash of opinions and ideologies. On the one hand Thimme was a representative of the "Siegen, Siegen, Siegen" philosophy, on the other hand there were those to whom Siegen meant death, hunger, privation and endless horror. To him it was unthinkable that the state should give in to the strikers' demands, because any conciliatory gesture on behalf of the government would be interpreted as weakness by the enemy powers and thereby strengthen their resolve to fight on. He concluded that the state at this critical moment "der Scheide des Krieges" had no choice but to oppose the strikers and their sympathizers with all the means at its disposal.² But Thimme was similarly unsparing in his criticism of the Conservatives attitude toward the strike.

He held them at least partially responsible for its occurrence and wholly responsible for the bitterness of the workers. Much of the blame, he felt, could be laid on the doorsteps of the Vaterländische-annexationist bloc and their press propaganda, which had made a habit of playing Ludendorff off against the government, frightening many in the public sector with the possibility that these extremist views would only lead to a prolongation of the war. The failure of the workers in having made any progress towards the democratization of the Parliament and towards an extended franchise, had also been exclusively due to the blockade of such measures by the conservative factions and other privileged groups, whom the workers correctly accused of not having contributed as much to the war, and yet laying a monopoly claim to patriotism and heroism.³ As Thimme realized there were no immediate solutions available and he did not follow the Conservative example of laying the blame on the leaders of the Social Democratic Party, Scheidemann and Ebert. He did however, suggest that the government should forge ahead with the political reforms it had promised, in spite of the strike and not because of it, and thereby depriving the strikers of their raison d'être and he promised the full cooperation of his own Volksbund in this endeavour, as well as his own considerable talents and energies.⁴

Obviously still smitten with the idea of a cohesive opposition to the conservative elements, Thimme was engaged in the writing of a catechism for the Volksbund für Freiheit und Vaterland, to facilitate the spread of their program and to make a larger audience aware of its aims.⁵ Thimme also made one of his rare confessions regarding his attitude towards some of the material he was writing, by informing his

brother that an article on "Wilhelm II und die Demokratie" was aimed at the neutral countries, especially Switzerland, in the hope to garner support for the German cause abroad.⁶ Undoubtedly some of his other works had been written with similar, or parallel objectives in mind, though he was seldom as explicit about his aims as with this one. As if to underline his own political re-orientation away from the extreme type of conservatism, he had ceased to write for Die Grenzboten and instead was now contributing to the Europäische Staats- und Wirtschaftszeitung and Das neue Deutschland, publications which he claimed demanded a higher literary and intellectual quality than his previous Sprachrohre.⁷ *

He informed his brother that the threat of a Conservative reaction, led by the Vaterlandspartei, appeared to be over for the time being, and he was confident that if the government would stand by its policies with regards to voting reforms, then the battle against both the strikers and the reactionaries would be won. As a sidelight he pointed out that the Emperor did not appear to be too taken in by the use of gas as a chemical warfare method. Much was made of the Kaiser's attitude towards gas warfare by the Entente propaganda, and if Thimme's observation was correct, then most of it was directed against Wilhelm II, falsely.⁸

His fears as to the success of the Wahlrechtsreformen were not allayed by a conversation he had with the former Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg and the latter's disclosure about the attitudes of the Kaiser

* Most likely the explanation for the change over can be found in the fact that Die Grenzboten was a staunch supporter of the ultra-conservative Vaterlandspartei and as such Thimme's own position as a founding father of the Volksbund made his literary affiliation untenable.

towards some of the problems facing the nation. In the light of these revelations Thimme had serious reservations as to whether the Kaiser would be able to muster enough courage to see the voting reforms through to the end in the face of stiff opposition from the Conservative camp. In a letter to his brother Wilhelm he accused the Emperor of being always tractable to the wishes of Ludendorff and Hindenburg, and that the latter was not above using the Bismarckian technique of tears, to elicit the necessary response from the "All Highest". Whether or not Thimme was recounting some Byzantine court gossip is immaterial. What mattered was the fact that a kaisertreu subject could indulge in serious reservations about the quality of leadership being offered at the top.⁹ If it was symptomatic of his peers, then the problems besetting Germany were much more deeply rooted than they cared to admit to themselves or to the public.

In typical fashion he proceeded to write another article in order to forestall any possible failure on voting reforms, entitled "Bindung der Krone" in the democratic Berliner Tageblatt; it was an unabashed attempt to directly influence the course of events.¹⁰ But it was to be of no avail, because on May 2nd, 1918, the proposals were turned down by a combined opposition of conservatives, liberals and center parties. Thimme's disappointment was obvious and he saw the vote as a last ditch attempt to stem the inevitable trend towards democratization, a trend which he was sure would triumph in the end, and one which he pointed out had already overtaken the enemy nations. He based his arguments about the inevitability of democratic reforms on the speech of Kaiser, given during the previous July, wherein the Monarch had promised the nation equal voting rights, and Thimme felt that this

promise would be instrumental in the end.¹¹ It was with regard to the Kaiser's role in these developments that he fell prey once more to his innate Emperor worship, despite his earlier criticism of the Army-Crown relationship. "Es wird immer der Ruhm Wilhelm II. bleiben, dass er, wie er 1890 in der Frage der Sozialpolitik, wie er später in der Frage der Flottenpolitik seinem Volk die Wege gewiesen hat, so 1917 aus den gewaltigen Erfahrungen und Erlebnissen des Krieges heraus den Mut gefunden hat, die Gleichheit des preussischen Wahlrechtes als sein Program zu proklamieren.", in order that " . . . ein wahrer Volkstaat mit einem wahren Volkskönigtum aus der Asche steigt."¹² Surely a piece of sentimental misjudgement that distorted the real role of the Kaiser in these developments. As Thimme had admitted earlier, if the Kaiser had taken a more positive stand in the political re-orientation, there would have been little that stood in the way of these developments, but in view of his vacillating attitude, the Conservatives carried the day.

In the face of continual defeats at home and the lack of progress at the front, even the indefatigable attitude of Thimme was wont to suffer somewhat. The first perceptible crack in the "Siegen, Siegen" facade occurred in June of 1918 when he ventured the opinion that perhaps weapons alone would not win the war, and that some other solution may have to be found.¹³ * However, as he candidly admitted,

* "Er hat ja eigentlich recht, vor allem damit dass die Waffen allein den Frieden auch nicht erwingen können. Aber das auszusprechen, heisst doch die ganze alldeutsche Meute und mit ihr - Ludendorff gegen sich aufzubringen." (Letter to Emma, 20.6.'18). In a speech to the Reichstag on June 24, 1918, Richard von Kühlmann had made reference to the fact that the war could not be won by military means alone. As a result of this sentiment he found himself dismissed from his post of Staatssekretär. For text of his speech see Annelise Thimme, Flucht in den Mythos, p. 174. For the circumstances of his dismissal see Fritz Fischer, Griff nach der Weltmacht, pp. 833-836.

to say so openly was to invite the enmity of the right-wing extremists, and could be construed as an act close to treason. Nevertheless the fact that he had at least allowed himself to think about possible alternatives was a volte face and was undoubtedly accompanied by many agonizing hours of soul searching. Gradually throughout the summer of 1918, his position towards unconditional victory mellowed, and whereas the All-deutschen and the Conservatives held true to their principles of 1914, Thimme experienced a gradual shift away from the war aims and now indulged himself in the luxury of calling them chauvinist hotheads (nationale Heissporne). The failure of the Western offensive in the summer, represented to him, not so much a defeat for the Reich, as the collapse of the ideals of the Alldeutsche and he was quick to seize upon this chance, as an opportunity for his own Volksbund to put forward its moderate war aims (Mässigung der Kriegsziele) and to reap some political benefits in the process. On the whole he still appeared to have political ambitions for the movement, whether out of an idée fixe or whether he seriously believed in its eventual success is unclear.¹⁴ At any rate it offered him, if nothing else, a political platform and a raison d'être for his political experiments and plans, because he was aware that some important political changes were in the offing and it was only natural that he wanted to be ready for them. During the summer of 1918 his disillusionment increased and the eventual outcome of the war appeared to be more doubtful than ever, certainly the probability of a German victory seemed remote, and his depression increased, the more obvious this became. Despite the fact that he had been extremely well informed as to all phases of the political and military developments over the last four years, the rapid collapse of

morale and the apparent decline in Germany's military capabilities caught him by surprise. And it was no wonder therefore that he confessed to a feeling of utter consternation ("förmlich fassungslos") when he learned of the request for an armistice and of the peace proposals put forth by Hindenburg in October.¹⁵ He was at a loss to explain how this sudden turn of events could have come about. How, he asked, could the Military have been so wrong as to their own capabilities, and their false estimation of their opponents, (Wie es geschehen konnte, . . . ist mir ein Rätsel). The first and partially correct answer appeared to him to be the fact that Ludendorff had neglected his military duties while concentrating on internal politics.¹⁶ But the most obvious answer escaped him. The fact was that the collapse had not come about as suddenly as was now explained by the military authorities. Rather the war in the past months had been carried on under a guise of false hopes; by withholding vital information from the people at home in the hope of that last final drive which was needed to change the course of events, but which never materialized. This fraudulent exercise in futility had obviously fooled most, including Thimme, and thus the "sudden" reversals of fortunes was difficult to accept, because victory had seemed within reach only a few months earlier.

Thimme however did not accept defeat easily. Whether this is to his credit, especially since other men's lives were involved, is debateable. At any rate he did not exclude the possibility of a general strike, to grind the military machine to a halt, or conversely and what he viewed as a better solution, a levée en masse.^{*} With the

* Klaus Schwabe in Kriegsmoral, makes reference to the fact that

latter measure he hoped the Western Front could be held until the winter months, thus gaining valuable time which could then be devoted to a re-organization of forces. The scheme was not only fantastic but also fatalistic, because he, as an intellectual, failed to acknowledge defeat in the face of the obvious, and instead exhorted everyone to try and twist fortune's tail with a gambler's abandon.¹⁷ In this endeavour he was encouraged by the change in government which had taken place and which had resulted in a parliamentary regime under the auspices of the Social Democratic Party. Because of the change he counted on the Social Democratic Party to call on the populace for a last ditch effort. When this hope failed to materialize, his own spirits reached a nadir which embittered him towards anyone who failed to heed his call for the Untergang in Ehren. He castigated those who, he claimed, indulged themselves in the Peace-psychosis (Friedenspsychose), a phenomenon which he claimed dominated everyone and had already led to calls for the abdication of the Emperor and the Crown Prince.¹⁸ * What he failed to realize from his intellectually and materially privileged viewpoint, was that things did not look as bleak to him as they did to the majority of the population, and thus he was at a loss to explain why they would want to quit.¹⁹ **

Walther Rathenau had been the first to call for a levee en masse, and that many intellectuals supported this idea enthusiastically. "Damit hatte die Siegfriedens-Ideologie ihre höchste Steigerung erreicht.", pp. 174-175.

*"Schrecklich, wenn man dem eigenen Volke, auf das man bis eben, trotz aller seiner Schwächen noch gebaut hat, nichts grosses mehr zuvertrauen kann." (Letter to Wilhelm, 6.10.'18).

**"Eigentlich Not herrscht, soweit ich sehe, kaum". (Ibid).

A lot of course, was now attributed to what he called the "bazillus des Bolschewismus" which he claimed was making the rounds and undermining morale. The fear of bolshevism was seen as the explanation why the Social Democratic Party would want to take over the government in the face of almost certain defeat, and partly served as a solution to Thimme's own concept of events.* The fact that the Social Democratic Party now formed the government led him to reflect as to the course of events that would have resulted, if in the past, less attention had been paid to socialist demands and more leeway had been given to the conservatives. The conclusion he reached was the obvious, the internal front would have collapsed even earlier, or would have never materialized in the first place.²⁰ ** It had already become obvious to him that the assignment of guilt for Germany's failure would not be an easy task and would occupy much of the immediate future. The outlook for that future was further darkened by the thoughts of the upcoming generations and what lay in store for them; a life without Kaiser or Vaterland, and he could only conclude that he was grateful that he at least had experienced the greatness of the past decades.²¹ ***

*"Als ich Scheidemann fragte . . . lautete die Antwort: es sei nur geschehen, damit nicht der Bolschewismus triumphiere." (Ibid).

**"Die Hauptschuld sehe ich doch in dem Vorgehen der Konservativen gegen Bethmann Hollweg. Ach, um die Schuldfrage wird wohl bald, wenn unser Unglück sich vollenden sollte, ein Streit von furchtbarer Heftigkeit entbrennen. Ich fürchte, ich muss es wohl noch erleben, dass der innere Frieden, auf den ich so sehr hoffte und für den ich wirken wollte, auch wenn ich gegen die Übertreibungen mancher Parteien ankämpfte, sich ganz und gar in den inneren Unfrieden verkehrt." (Ibid).

*** Friedrich Meinecke in Strassburg/ Freiburg/ Berlin 1901-1919 (K. F. Koehler Verlag, Stuttgart, 1949) voiced a similar sentiment, "Nur wer vor 1914 gelebt hat, weiss eigentlich was leben heisst.", p. 134.

Even God appeared to have forsaken the German people ("ob Gott seine Deutschen in der Tat verlässt") and the only hope that one could hold out was, " . . . dass wir wenigstens in Ehren untergehen", a piece of sentimentality undoubtedly shared by many of his class, but one which had few attractions for the mass of the people who had already suffered long and hard without much honor.²² He nevertheless hoped that he could persuade his Volksbund to join him in this mad enterprise, and perhaps encourage some leading personage to partake in the venture. With this in mind he expressly wrote an article which had this "victory or death" attitude as its guiding principle.²³ His disappointment was also carried over to the churches, whom he accused of failing to rise to the occasion by not doing their share in exhorting the masses to arise in a levée en masse, and he castigated them for their past failures of not having done their patriotic duty to the best of their ability throughout the war, and concluded that it was undoubtedly for this reason that they have now been abandoned by the "German God".²⁴

Yet a few days later his hopes were once again revived by a curious point of reasoning. Thimme did not expect an armistice to come about as quickly as everyone anticipated, because he felt that the conditions put forth by the enemy powers would be such, that they would have to be rejected by Germany, since no government could hope to acquiesce without losing support at home. Therefore if the Allied demands were too harsh a possible impasse could yet be reached. What the alternatives were, if any, he did not mention, but the seriousness of the entire situation did not yet appear to have struck home, because he held out hope that the Reich would escape the shameful collapse of

Austrian proportions, though why this should be so he left unclear.²⁵ Lastly, he held out hope for the continuation of the Monarchy, though again he was imprecise as to the whys, especially since he felt that the Kaiser had become more of a liability than an asset, because he appeared to have lost all command of the situation and therefore his non-ruling presence had created a power vacuum.* On the other hand, he was certain that if the Kaiser should resign then the front would immediately collapse, because the men were sworn to the Emperor but not to a republic. Secondly, the end of the Monarchy itself would entail all types of disasters, because in his view nothing could replace it and certainly nothing could substitute for it even temporarily.²⁶

For Thimme the course of events had thus reached some sort of threshold: Defeat in war, collapse of the internal peace and the abolition of the Monarchy. To him it was a tragedy of unparalleled proportions in view of the expectations which had existed only a short time earlier. Undoubtedly, for Thimme this was especially difficult, because so much of his own energies and psyche had been devoted to the very results which he now saw destroyed and no one had worked harder or more faithfully towards the ends which could now never be realized. Whereas, at the beginning of the war he had longed to pick up the Streitaxt himself, and at the end of it he felt " . . . wie mit einer Axt vor den Kopf geschlagen.", an allegorical beginning and ending

*" . . . wenn der Kaiser selbst absolut ohne inneren Halt ist. Das ist ja unser grosses Unglück; ein schwankendes und geknicktes Rohr im Sturmwind." (Letter to Wilhelm beginning of November).

which he was probably unaware of.*

The unexpected collapse (der unerwartete Zusammenbruch) or at least the belief in one, could be used as a rationalization of one's unfulfilled dreams, or the unexpectedness could also lead to a search for the causes of the collapse. With Thimme it led to both.

*"Man geht wie mit einer Axt vor den Kopf geschlagen herum".
(Letter to Karl, 7.10.1918).

FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER IV

¹Friedrich Thimme, "Der Streik", Deutsche Politik, No. 7, 8.2.1918, p. 173.

²Ibid., p. 174.

³Ibid., pp. 171-172.

⁴Thimme papers (unpublished letters 1914-1918) Friedrich Thimme to Wilhelm Thimme, 2.2.1918.

⁵Ibid., Friedrich Thimme to Wilhelm Thimme, beginning of February 1918. See also Friedrich Thimme to Wilhelm Thimme 10.2.1918.

⁶Ibid., p. 1.

⁷Ibid., p. 2.

⁸Ibid., p. 2.

⁹Ibid., Friedrich Thimme to Wilhelm Thimme, 22.2.1918.

¹⁰Ibid., Friedrich Thimme to Wilhelm Thimme, 27.4.1918.

¹¹Friedrich Thimme, "Das Wort des Königs", Deutsche Politik, No. 19, 10.5.1918, pp. 579-580. This article was written May 1st, i.e. before the vote took place.

¹²Ibid., p. 581 and p. 584.

¹³Thimme papers (unpublished letters 1914-1918) Friedrich Thimme to Emma Thimme, 20.6.1918, p. 1.

¹⁴Ibid., Friedrich Thimme to Wilhelm Thimme, beginning of July 1918.

¹⁵Ibid., Friedrich Thimme to Wilhelm Thimme, 6.10.1918, p. 1.
See also Friedrich Thimme to Karl Thimme, 7.10.1918, p. 1.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 1.

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 1-2. See also Friedrich Thimme to Karl Thimme,
7.10.1918, p. 1.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 1.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 2.

²⁰Ibid., p. 2. See also Friedrich Thimme to Karl Thimme
7.10.1918, p. 1.

²¹Ibid., p. 3. See also Friedrich Thimme to Karl Thimme
7.10.1918, p. 1. See also Friedrich Thimme to Emma Thimme, 6.10.1918,
"Wir alten haben das gute doch wenigstens einmal genossen".

²²Ibid., Friedrich Thimme to Karl Thimme, 7.10.1918, p. 1.

²³Ibid., p. 2.

²⁴Ibid., p. 2.

²⁵Ibid., Friedrich Thimme to Wilhelm Thimme, 15.10.1918, and
letter of 21.10.1918.

²⁶Ibid., letter beginning of November 1918. See also unpub-
lished manuscript of Karl Thimme, Mein Bruder, p. 31.

CHAPTER V

"IN THE SERVICE OF TRUTH"

Meine einzige Hoffnung ist, dass wir wenigstens in Ehren untergehen. In diesem Sinne werde ich zu wirken suchen,

(Friedrich Thimme
7.10.1918.)

The end of the war meant not only the end of a chapter in the political development of Germany, but it also marked the end of an era and a style of life. For Friedrich Thimme it marked the end of one phase of his career and left him uncertain for some time about his own future. The political upheavals and the abolition of the monarchical institutions, included the abolition of the Prussian Upper House, and hence Thimme's post as Director of its library. While he could be fairly certain that his talents would be employed elsewhere, the immediate future looked uncertain and indefinite as, of course, it did for many others. However, Thimme was aware that "epoch-making events" were taking place and that the individual, temporarily at least, would have to take a backseat to the political events that were apparently reshaping Germany. To his brother Karl, he wrote, "Aber was ist das Schicksal einzelner gegen die unsägliche Not Deutschlands.", and while this sentiment may have a cliché-like quality about it, it at least demonstrated his understanding of the personal changes that befell him and others at this time.¹

The easy acceptance of his personal misfortune was undoubtedly mitigated by the fact that he viewed the events subsequent to November, as a "Revolution". To him, as to most Germans, the winter of 1918-19,

spelled the end of the Wilhelmine system and with it everything that had represented the zenith of western culture and political development. That it was not and in fact would not be a revolution, as later events were to demonstrate, was to him totally unimaginable at the time.

"Glücklich die Toten, die ihr Leben im Glauben an Glück und Grösse des Vaterlandes hingegeben", he told his brother Karl that winter, and to Wilhelm he had earlier written, "Mit Sorgen gedenke ich meiner Kinder. Wie sollen sie gross werden, wenn sie nicht getragen werden von dem Gedanken an ein Vaterland, das des Lebens wert ist."² *

Like Hans Delbrück, the "sudden" collapse of the German army made him "fassungslos", but both Delbrück and Thimme tried to view the events not only as contemporaries but also as historians and tried hard to keep "den Kopf kühl und klar" during these momentous days.³ It was as a historian that he analysed the events in Berlin during the last days of 1918, reaching the conclusion that the time was ripe for civil war and total anarchy. This situation Thimme felt, would be aggravated by the return of the army, in whose discipline he placed little faith once it re-crossed the borders of the Reich.** Of course

* Friedrich Meinecke in Nach der Revolution, Munich 1919, has a different version of the events in November 1918. He felt that it was not the Bismarck system that had collapsed (nicht das echte . . . preussische System) but a bastardized version (sondern das entartete) i.e. the one which held court between 1890-1914, the Germany of Wilhelm II., p. 18. Yet in a later work, Erinnerungen (Stuttgart 1949) he was to state, "Nur wer vor 1914 gelebt hat, weiss eigentlich was leben heisst.", p. 134.

** Thimme's apprehension about the army was shared by others. While the army had formed the backbone and stabilizing factor of the monarchy, the flight and abdication of the Kaiser, made it a free agent, no longer bound by oath. Ernst Troeltsch analyzed the events of November as a military revolution since the proletarianization of the army appeared to be the only unifying factor at the front and at

the uncertainties of his own career, and the misapprehension about the form of government that would replace the defunct monarchy, were partly the result of his new-found class consciousness. For the first time in his life Thimme was faced with the harsh realities of social divisions, and the effects that such a stratification could produce during a period of stress. Until the demise of the Kaiserreich, he had belonged to a privileged group. Now as a member of that stratum he found himself temporarily at least, in a disenfranchised position resulting from the change of regimes. As he stated in November, "Ganz sicher ist ja heute niemand, mit der Ausnahme der Arbeiter", and since he clearly did not fall into this group, he belonged to the other side by default.⁴ Whether this awareness of belonging to the "other" side, clouded his political judgement in terms of the political re-orientation that was taking place, is difficult to determine during the winter months of 1918-19. Certainly Thimme was aware that he might have to undergo some political modifications, since his monarchical position

home. He pointed to the soldiers soviets, the disappearance of the officers, the laying down of arms and the psychological disorientation of the army as one of the really unsettling events of the "November days". As he states in his letter of November 30, "Kein Mann tot für Kaiser und Reich!" See Ernst Troeltsch, Spektator Briefe, Aufsätze über die deutsche Revolution und die Weltpolitik 1918-22 (Scientia Verlag, Aalen 1966), p. 26. August Winnig observed that "when the Republic took the place of the Monarchy, nobody opposed the Republic in order to die for the Monarchy." From August Winnig, Das Reich als Republik 1918-1928 (Berlin 1929), p. 54, quoted in Klemens von Klemperer, Germany's New Conservatism (Princeton University Press 1957), p. 77. Wilhelm Groener, in Lebenserinnerungen (Göttingen Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1957), speaks of the ties between the army and the Emperor, pp. 447-448 and on p. 472 observes, "Die in vollster Ordnung zurückmarschierenden Truppen blieben in der Hand ihrer Führer bis zu dem Augenblick, da sie am Rhein in die revolutionäre Atmosphäre eintraten; von da ab war kein Halten mehr.", thus confirming Thimme's suspicions.

was now a liability rather than an asset. On the other hand he was not prepared to wholly support the socialist trend, either in deed or word, since they represented too radical a break from his traditional convictions. However, he was aware that the Socialist offered the only viable alternative to the Räterepublik in the immediate days following the armistice, and as a result looked towards them for decisive leadership, without however committing himself to their cause.⁵ Why he did not pursue the political goals of His own Volksbund für Freiheit und Vaterland, and use it as a vehicle for the political Neuorientierung of Germany, Thimme does not state, nor does he elaborate on the fate of this ill-starred attempt. The most obvious explanation is probably to be found in his own self-analysis in November of 1918. After four years of hyper-active participation, he was suddenly consumed by a fatalism towards any kind of political activity, and though he "tactically" supported the Democrats, he did this not out of any firm democratic convictions, but rather to counter-act radical tendencies among the Social Democrats, and at the moment it appeared as though the Democrats offered the only alternative.⁶

His cooling ardour towards political involvement was also the result of his realization that the future held promise of far greater involvement for a historian than the political scene did at the moment. Even before the end of the war it had been clear to him that the dominant problem in post-war Germany would center around the assignation of responsibilities for the past failures. The search for "guilt" would affect the political development of the nation at home and abroad; it also would shape the philosophical direction of Germany until the issues were resolved. In October of 1918, he had already voiced his

concern to Wilhelm, stating "Ach, um die Schuldfrage wird wohl bald, wenn unser Unglück sich vollenden sollte, ein Streit von furchtbarer Heftigkeit entbrennen," little realizing that he would be caught in the midst of this Streit.⁷ Thimme was aware that all parties past and present, all classes whether social or economic, would have a deep and consuming interest in this problem and would not rest until it could be demonstrated that the causes for the calamity that had befallen Germany were the result of circumstances beyond her control. His own search for a cause had begun before the armistice, and in his letters from October 1918 onwards, the apportionment of responsibility covered the gamut from Church to Kaiser.⁸ After November that search was expanded to include not only why the war was lost, but to determine why Germany had been involved at all; and why this catastrophe could take place between so-called "civilized Christian nations".^{*} Thimme obviously felt that his qualifications were eminently suitable for this search, classifying himself as "einen rechtsstehenden Historiker, der oft genug bewiesen hatte, dass er gar nicht daran dachte, die im Ausland und schmählicherweise sogar vielfach in Deutschland selbst geltenden Anschauungen über unsere Kriegsschuld zu teilen".⁹

The primary candidate of those who had "shamefully" accepted and acknowledged Germany's responsibility for the war in Thimme's estimation, was Maximilian Harden the publisher of the Zukunft, a weekly magazine which after its inception in 1892 became the political conscience of the Wilhelmine period.¹⁰ Harden, during his term as

^{*}Or as Bethmann Hollweg put it, "'den Wahnsinn einer Selbstzerfleischung der europäischen Kulturnationen'". Quoted in Eberhard v. Vietsch, Bethmann Hollweg (Harald Boldt Verlag, Boppard am Rhein 1969), p. 192, from I. Geiss Julikrise, Nr. 1118.

publisher from 1892-1922, managed within that period to combine, pan-Germanism, nationalism, pro-war policies and yet at the same time fulminate against Wilhelm II, because the latter had abandoned Bismarck's policies. However, despite the fact that at the beginning of the war there had been no greater jingoist in Germany than Harden, at the end of it he had undergone a remarkable metamorphosis, now Germany saw him as a foremost supporter of Wilsonian principles, and one who could openly admit in his columns that Germany had been wrong and was indeed guilty of offenses against international peace. It was this complete transfiguration that had caught Thimme's attention. Harden epitomized those who were now in the forefront trying not only to make the best of a bad situation, but who were in effect denying their past, as though it had never existed or influenced their actions. Thimme's bitterness against this was summed up in an article, "Maximilian Harden am Pranger".¹¹ It was a polemic, the aim of which was the destruction of Harden as a publisher, a German citizen and as a man. Thimme's accusations portrayed Harden as " . . . einer der Hauptschuldigen an dem Weltkrieg zu sein. - . . . einer der Hauptschuldigen an der deutschen Niederlage zu sein. - . . . einer der Hauptschuldigen an dem schliesslichen Endresultat des Versailler Schmach - und Schandfriedens zu sein."¹² The evidence for these grave charges, Thimme found in the pages of the Zukunft, using the publisher's own words to substantiate the case against him. While few rose to the support of Harden, and fewer still questioned Thimme's charges, indeed, Harden himself did not deny the fact that he had undergone a re-evaluation of attitudes; it was of course absurd to call him one of the chief offenders against

Germany.* Harden of course vigorously denied the specific charges, disclaiming responsibility on all counts and equating them with being held responsible for all the cosmic disasters of the past.¹³ However, this attempt to find someone, who could be blamed for Germany's collective failures was the inevitable result of the psychosis that engulfed men like Thimme, who refused to believe that Germany had failed as a nation. They refused to recognize that her leaders had only been symptomatic of the society and not the creators of it. To them there had been nothing amiss in pre-1914 Germany, it was only individuals that had gone astray. Thimme's attack on Harden may also have been the outgrowth of a more personal problem. To a degree, Thimme had also modified his stance during the war and in the immediate period following the armistice. Where he had been annexationist in 1914, he had been conciliatory in 1917; where he had called for a Siegfrieden as late as 1917, he had hoped for a peace of understanding in 1918; and where he had envied those who had died on the "field of honor", thus escaping the shame of defeat, in 1919 he was prepared to work within the existing circumstances of Versailles. To a degree Thimme thus found himself mirrored in Harden, and though the latter had been more extreme in every aspect, this self-awareness posed certain dangers. Thimme probably did not want to face the realization just then that his own ardent nationalism had mellowed into co-operative internationalism to the degree where it was now possible for him to accept the existence of

*The article attracted considerable attention, in the press. Almost without exception the response was favourable to Thimme most of the reviews supporting the latter's stand against Harden. (The private papers of A. Thimme contain twenty-one newspaper clippings of the summer and fall of 1919, of which only one criticizes Thimme for his harsh and prejudicial attack.)

a defeated Germany working within the framework of a victorious Europe. Such an accommodating position in 1914 would have been self-treason, in 1919 it had become a fact of life.

This did not make the acceptance of the "Diktat" of Versailles any easier and in fact Thimme never ceased to regard it as anything but an unjustified imposition by the victors. As a consequence his appointment as one of the co-editors to the publication of the Documents on German Foreign Policy* presented him with the opportunity to examine in detail the question of "guilt" and perhaps finding the "guilty ones". The fact that he was selected perhaps in spite of his self-established credentials as a right-wing historian, only confirmed his own belief that his objectivity vis-à-vis Germany's policies was beyond reproach. More poignant perhaps, was the fact that Thimme was considered suitable enough to mollify the alienated conservative circles who had taken umbrage at the Kautsky publications of Die Deutschen Dokumente zum Kriegausbruch. Earlier some other prominent historians, among them Hans Delbrück and Friedrich Meinecke, had declined the offer to become editors, and the final choice had to be made between Hermann Oncken and Friedrich Thimme. The latter in all likelihood received the nod, because of his well recognized and well known political orientation, which made him acceptable to the right-wing circles, and yet assured the left of a modicum of historical balance.¹⁴ Kautsky's hurried publication in 1919 of the four volumes of documents, plus his own commentaries to the, Wie der Weltkrieg entstand, had precipitated a storm of protest among monarchial and conservative groups, especially because the highly controversial Randbemerkungen of the Kaiser had been included

* Die Grosse Politik der Europäischen Kabinette 1871-1914.

therein. Thimme found the inclusion of this marginalia scandalous, because he interpreted it as an attempt by Kautsky to provide proof of the Kaiser's guilt, whereas in his estimation they were generally of an unpolitical nature and as such redundant, and certainly not of policy-making importance.¹⁵ He agreed however, that the Kaiser may have gone overboard in his commentaries at times and in the insults he directed against various individuals and certain policies, but this he felt in no way implied that they became directives for German policy, at least not until they had been thoroughly worked out by the foreign office. "So liessen sich noch viele Beispiele dafür beibringen, dass die offizielle deutsche Politik nicht etwa im Schlepptau der kaiserlichen Randbemerkungen gestanden hat.", and that they are certainly not evidence as Kautsky seems to insinuate of a deliberate Kriegslust on the part of the Emperor.¹⁶ Yet he missed Kautsky's argument entirely when he stated, "dass Wilhelm II, nicht den Weltkrieg, sondern allenfalls nur den lokalisierten Österreichisch serbischen Krieg gewollt habe;".¹⁷ Therein lay the tragedy of the whole conflict; no one wanted a world war, but conditions were such in 1914, that localized issues had international implications, a fact Thimme must have been aware of. Yet he denied the same knowledge to the Kaiser, perhaps in order to protect him against attacks by those who held him solely responsible for the ensuing calamity in 1914. Out of a sense of loyalty to the old institutions, out of a sense of responsibility as a former employee of the Kaiserreich and out of a sense of personal dedication to the Kaiser, Thimme at first went out of his way to demonstrate to the world the apparent innocence of the Emperor. He did this often in the face of stiff and competent opposition not for pecuniary gain, but

simply out of love for Kaiser and fatherland and out of a sense of righteousness, born of the conviction that his judgement was perhaps less clouded than most because of his Überparteilich stance in the past. His past aloofness from party politics and his self-styled neutrality in historical interpretation were weaknesses in themselves however. Through his determined effort to preserve these guidelines at any cost, he often became embroiled in attacks from every political corner and in the end quite often failed to satisfy anyone with his analysis. Furthermore the deliberate non-partisan approach often neglected the human and emotional element, which in an emotional time could be, and often was, of crucial importance. After four years of conflagration he failed to understand at times, that rationality was not always uppermost in everyone's mind and that friend and foe alike were still caught up in the consuming passions that had guided their actions during this momentous struggle.

In the spring of 1919 Bethmann Hollweg's publication, Betrachtungen zum Weltkrieg, provided Thimme with the opportunity to mount an attack against those who viewed the former Chancellor as the chief architect of Germany's failures during the war. His initial reaction had been that the memoirs were half a year late to be of any value to Germany's struggle against the allied "lie". Thimme based his reasoning on the assumption that the publication would have done much towards changing the allied attitude at Versailles, had it been available to the negotiators of both sides. Whether the memoirs of the war-Chancellor would have indeed proven to be of any help, even to the German delegation, may be questioned, especially since Bethmann's underlying thesis was the collective guilt of all nations (Gesamtschuld

aller Nationen) a point of view which was anathema to the allied negotiators in 1919.¹⁸ It is entirely unclear as to how anything that Bethmann said or wrote at this time would have been of any conceivable use to lighten the load of Germany's assessed guilt. At best Thimme could have hoped for a change in public opinion abroad, though the effect this would have had on men like Clemenceau and Lloyd George can only be speculated upon. However, Thimme did correctly assess the impact of Bethmann's volume on Germany. The memoirs produced exactly the kind of reaction that he had hoped for, a reinforcement of the revulsion against the Diktat of Versailles and a growing conviction that Germany had indeed been sold out. In the light of Bethmann's revelation Thimme felt that the war-commission report was a shallow and superficial document which despite its inadequacies and shortcomings, had not hesitated to lay the full blame for the war on Germany, "auf das deutsche Volk" ¹⁹ * Bethmann's work in Thimme's view only underlined the fact that allied demands seeking to put the Kaiser on trial as a war criminal, were the result of stupidity and hatred. The memoirs clearly established the fact that the Kaiser had been, and continued to be, a peace-seeking and conciliatory man who was being persecuted unjustly by the vengeful allies and it was therefore doubly important that " . . . deutsche Ehre nie in eine Auslie-

* Hans Delbrück, Max Weber, Albrecht Mendelssohn Bartholdy and General Max Montgelas were the four German experts summoned to Versailles to reply to the question of war guilt, as laid out by the allies in the summer of 1919. The German delegation felt that the allied commission had not examined in detail the background of the conflict leading up to 1914, and had thus reached a hasty decision. The same could be said of the German reply to the allied notes, which were rejected outright at first without detailed examination.

ferung und Verurteilung des Kaisers willigen darf und kann". This line of reasoning conveniently neglected to mention, of course, that the Kaiser had fled to Holland because he had been mistrustful of his kaisertreu subjects at home, none of whom had shown any desire to protect the throne or had been prepared to give their lives for it.²⁰ This did not indicate any particular desire on the part of the German public to see the Kaiser hung, as their British cousins were wont to demand, but by removing himself to Holland the Emperor had saved Germany the embarrassment of having to bring forth a solution as to what to do with a discredited, disenfranchised and disliked monarch.* The most commendable aspect of Bethmann's work appeared to be the attempt therein to make Russia responsible for the outbreak of the war. It was an interpretation that Thimme could hardly disagree with since he had reached a somewhat similar conclusion during the war, viewing Russia not necessarily as the Urheber, but certainly as the chief foe, and one whose reactionary regime presented the greatest challenge to the more liberal Reich. He therefore wholeheartedly concurred with Bethmann's analysis, "Russland hat mobil gemacht, weil es den Krieg wollte."; therefore Germany could at best be blamed for "Mitverantwortung, ja! aber nicht die allein Schuldigen."²¹ The Mitverantwortung in this case was limited to the invasion of Belgium, a point on which both Bethmann Hollweg and Thimme agreed in view of the ex-

* Kuno Graf von Westarp in Das Ende der Monarchie am 9. November 1918 (Helmut Rauschenbusch Verlag, Berlin 1952) makes it clear that the problem of what to do with the Kaiser was being discussed in military circles as early as October 1, 1918. It was clear by November that few soldiers would be prepared to sacrifice their lives to save the monarchy, and since the Kaiser failed to seek an honorable death at the front the best thing he could do was to flee the country. pp. 171-198.

Chancellors admission in the Reichstag on August 4, 1914, that Belgian neutrality had been violated. What had been considered commendable honesty then, was to be the cause of much enmity later on, however, when many of Bethmann's political opponents viewed his statement as an admission of guilt and a trump played into the hands of the Reich's enemies. Thimme at least was consistent in his loyalty to Bethmann because he continued to uphold the latter's position vis-à-vis Belgium.²² This notwithstanding, he had considerably altered his assessment of the former Chancellor, from what it had been during the war. In his foreword to Bethmann Hollweg's Kriegsreden he wrote, "Schwerlich wird sie (the world) finden, dass Deutschland und sein Kanzler frei von Schuld und Fehlern am Kriege und im Kriege geblieben seien".²³ This admission did not however, detract him from what he still held to be the paramount evil, the " . . . einseitigen Schuldspruch" the "erzwungenes Schuldgeständnis", both of which had little to do with Bethmann's role as Thimme analyzed it.²⁴ In a further display of his own ambiguity towards the complex problem of the former Chancellor, he exhorted him at one point as "ein militärischer Kanzler" yet in the next paragraph went out of his way to demonstrate that Bethmann had really been a Friedenskanzler, a man who had done everything possible to avoid war, yet one who had at the same time devoted equal energies "um sein Volk bestens für den Fall (war) zu wappnen".²⁵ Inevitably one detects in Thimme's analysis a certain satisfaction that the Kriegskanzler had retained the upper hand, because any conciliatory gestures would have been in Moltke's words "gleichbedeutend mit nationaler Demütigung" a condition which did not fit into Thimme's concept of Germany in 1914.²⁶

Bethmann Hollweg's untimely death in January of 1921, left a great many questions about his chancellorship unanswered, and no one was more aware of this than Thimme. He had counted on the Chancellor's revelations to lend further weight to his attempt to refute the guilt clause, and the loss of " . . . einen der grössten Verfechter der Schuldfrage" as he called Bethmann, the greatest witness to the events, would leave a serious gap in the defense against Versailles.²⁷ Thimme was also afraid that Bethmann's Betrachtungen would now be open to critical attacks, the nature of which only the ex-Chancellor had the knowledge to deal with. The political right as exemplified by the Vaterlandspartei and their successors, were especially critical of Bethmann's war policies. They had questioned the diplomatic and political aptitude of the man in the past and had continued to do so after he had left office. The accusation that "Das Deutsche Reich, das durch Bismarck's Staatskunst zusammengeschmiedet war, wurde durch Bethmann vernichtet," did not rest easy on Thimme's shoulders. He felt these accusations as being partly directed against himself, because in the past he had been closely identified with the Chancellor's policies and had supported him throughout the war.* He therefore interpreted the attacks as attempts to question his own political judgement. To justify both the ex-Chancellor's position and his own he felt called upon to lead the defense and thereby safeguard both his own and Bethmann's reputation. In Thimme's estimation Bethmann had pursued the correct foreign policies before and during the war and ultimately would

*Klaus Schwabe in Kriegsmoral, extensively discusses the split among the intellectuals in their support of Bethmann, see pp. 126-130.

have been successful in his endeavours despite the war. Since he was toppled from power in 1917 however, at the precise moment Thimme felt, when his plans were bearing results in the form of a tender peace proposal, he never had the chance to see them executed completely. Based upon this slender evidence, Thimme saw himself justified in putting forth the claim that the dismissal of the Chancellor brought about the collapse of the carefully built-up system of the Bethmannian-house-of-cards. He did not, of course, take into consideration that the war and the consequent appeal for a compromise-peace (Hubertusfrieden) could hardly be considered a successful diplomatic course of action under normal circumstances and that at best Bethmann could have hoped for a peace without Alsace-Lorraine, which was a far cry from the Siegfrieden that most of the policies during the early war years had been based on. Thimme would have denounced a Hubertusfrieden in 1915 as treason, yet such was his loyalty to the ex-Chancellor and his opposition to the Vaterlandspartei, which had engineered Bethmann's removal, that he could seriously suggest that such a peace would have been a diplomatic coup in 1917. However, when one considers the perspective from which Thimme was talking it is easy to understand why a compromise-peace looked attractive after the war and especially after Versailles. From the same perspective it is also easy to sympathize with Thimme's desire to find the real culprits, who were responsible for sabotaging Bethmann Hollweg's plans in 1917 and who thereby destroyed any future prospects of salvaging anything from the military debacle.²⁹ The blame fell squarely on the shoulders of the Vaterlandspartei which was in line with where he had placed it during the

war.* Their actions had brought political conditions within Germany to a boiling point after 1917, as a result of which the monarchy fell, if one followed his line of reasoning to its logical conclusion. In Thimme's estimation, Bethmann could have averted such an occurrence despite the military collapse and because his successors had obviously been incapable of doing the same, the thesis proved itself. If any blame could be attached to Bethmann, Thimme thought it would have to be found in the failure of the former Chancellor to bring about co-operation between the military and the political objectives. This failure of achieving some kind of unity either at the executive level or while policies were being formulated was the result of the military's incursion into the political arena, a fact which Bethmann had not opposed strongly enough while Chancellor. However, it is this interpretation by Thimme which does Bethmann a great injustice. It was the Emperor's failure to curb the military and to give support to his Chancellor, which led to this situation, a fact Thimme was perfectly familiar with, yet one which he conveniently left out in his kaisertreu analysis. He was also aware that the lack of moral support from the Kaiser often made the Chancellor's position untenable and that this alone negated most of the blame for which Bethmann received credit.³⁰

To his credit, however, Thimme did pursue the search for the failures of the political policies of Bethmann Hollweg beyond the

* Thimme's attacks on the Vaterlandspartei and the conservatives in general are contained in "Konservatismus und innerer Frieden", Die Grenzboten, 23 August 1916; "Vom inneren Unfrieden" Deutsche Politik, September 14, 1917, Nr. 37; and "Vaterlandspartei und innere Reform" Deutsche Politik, October 5, 1917, Nr. 40.

immediate war years. He felt that the blame for the miscarriage of German policy must be found in the period, and in the men who preceded the war-Chancellor, especially his immediate predecessor von Bülow, "Der 1914 im Amt befindliche deutsche Reichskanzler hatte eine politische Erbschaft übernommen, welche seinen rückhaltslos auf-richtigen Versuch, die internationale Lage zu entspannen, von vorn herein fast zur Ausichtslosigkeit verurteilte."³¹ * Bülow's policies or lack thereof, had closed the path to successful diplomatic maneuvers after 1909, and Thimme realized that Bethmann Hollweg had thus been faced with a course of action which allowed him little or no room to maneuver on the diplomatic scene, "Der Weg, den die deutsche Diplomatie gehen konnte - zu Fürst Bülows Zeiten war er noch breit und voller Möglichkeiten gewesen - war er eng und schmal geworden; er liess im wesentlichen nur noch die Möglichkeit eines Aufschubs der kriegerischen Auseinandersetzung teils durch eigene Rüstung, teils durch das ungewisse Mittel der stetigen, zähen, langsamen Verständigungs - und Ausgleicharbeit."³² Undoubtedly this explanation served its purpose by illustrating the difficulties that Bethmann encountered after assuming office, but it in no way underscored Thimme's own argument that Bethmann had been condemned to five years of inactivity because of his

* To validate his case against Fürst Bülow, Thimme went on the offensive writing an article, "Bülow and Bethmann Hollweg", Deutsche Politik, September 5, 1919, Nr. 36. Later he followed this up by editing a collection of twenty-four articles, published under the title Front wider Bülow, Staatsmänner, Diplomaten und Forscher zu seinen Denkwürdigkeiten, (Verlag F. Bruckmann Ag., Munich 1931). The volume attempted at one and the same time to repudiate the pre-war Chancellors policies and to counterbalance the latter's memoirs. Thimme's conclusions on Bülow's stewardship were harsh, "Auf dem geschichtlichen Leichenstein dieses Fürsten können nur die Worte Stehen: 'Untreue schlägt ihren eigenen Herrn.'", p. 20.

predecessors ineptitude. The argument also created doubts in academic circles about Thimme's objectivity towards his favourite Chancellor, and though many sympathized with his thesis, it became suspect in conservative quarters and was to involve Thimme in many bitter exchanges with the detractors of Bethmann Hollweg.³³

When the Foreign Office made the decision to publish its own version of the documents leading up to the war, partly in order to counteract the Kautsky fiasco, the primary problem facing the three editors was where to begin.*

The decision could have been an entirely arbitrary one, since there were no clear cut guidelines issued by the Foreign Office, and indeed, there were no precedents to be followed, since there had never been a publication of a similar nature or scope to which they could turn for advice. Initially it was thought that the immediate crisis surrounding the events of 1914 would fulfill the requirements, but it soon became obvious that these were only the outrunners of a much lengthier and protracted process. The problem facing the editors was that limiting the series to a definite period, might lead to charges that they were trying to hide some damaging material in the past. They agreed with their potential detractors that it would be difficult to assign relative weights to specific periods or events, and it was out of this consideration that the final solution agreed upon would see the complete examination of all documents since the establishment

*Thimme's co-editors were Johannes Lepsius (1858-1926) and Albrecht Mendelssohn Bartholdy (1874-1935). Since Lepsius became ill long before the completion of the work and was consequently not replaced and since Mendelssohn was not an historian either by training or inclination, the bulk of the work, from beginning to end, rested on Thimme's shoulders.

of the Reich in 1871. This, it was hoped, would forestall any charges of selectivity. It was also hoped by the editors, that a complete opening of the German archives would challenge or embarrass other nations into doing likewise and in the process provide some evidence that they were mitschuldig or perhaps better yet, more guilty than the Reich. This at least was one of the underlying motives for going ahead with complete frankness. Though the end results were not to justify these heady expectations, - England and France only following suit at a later date - the possibility of other nations doing so, provided a powerful stimulus for Thimme and his cohorts.³⁴ Thimme's early enthusiasm and belief in the project he was undertaking was unbounded, "Bereits beginnt sich denn auch ein Umschwung in dem Urteil der Welt Über die Schuldfrage anzubahnen;" he claimed in 1922, barely having begun on the monumental task.³⁵ Such a claim of course, was more of a self-justification than a demonstrable fact, yet it illustrated the values that the editors hoped to derive from the work and the faith the Foreign Office had put in its revelations. Thimme's exuberance and over-estimation of this enterprise and the importance of it can also be seen in his claim that the allies had now put themselves at a moral disadvantage by not immediately following the German example. It is doubtful of course, if anyone outside Germany cared very much one way or another at the time he made these statements, and events in the Ruhr a year later demonstrated that some of the allies were not influenced by the moral qualms that he had spoken of. On the other hand, it is easy to sympathize with the editors of the monumental work and their attempts to foster the worthiness of the project with every means at their disposal. They had been given a carte blanche to use

the material at hand as they saw fit, and because of the wealth of information to be gleaned from it, it must have appeared at times as if the whole world had indeed centered around the Berlin Foreign Office in those halcyon days prior to August 1914.

In a further attempt to elicit some response from abroad, the editors decided that the material would be arranged topically rather than chronologically. It was felt that such a presentation would be much more effective in providing historians outside Germany with specific topics suitable for refutation. Also such an arrangement, according to Thimme, would allow for an easier exposé of the Schuld-
these which after all, was the leitmotif of the whole project. Again however, these expectations failed to materialize. The topical arrangement brought a wave of valid criticism from home and abroad, from those who saw it as an attempt by Thimme et al to make the reader see connections, which perhaps did not exist, except as the result of this particular arrangement, and thus objected to it on the grounds that it could lead to a re-interpretation of historical events.³⁶ From Thimme's correspondence pertaining to the Aktenpublikation and from his earlier writings, it is evident however, that historical misrepresentation was not only furthest from his mind, but that it ran counter to everything he had believed in since his earliest contacts with historical writings. To him historical misrepresentation would not only have been reprehensible, but also unpatriotic. He was firmly convinced that the evidence would weigh in Germany's favour, and therefore could stand the scrutiny of honest investigation. The foremost goal was to be truth and not an attempt to influence public opinion though this it was hoped, would automatically follow. The failure of

France and England to follow this example only confirmed his suspicion that they had something to hide.³⁷ * His own objectivity had already been confirmed as far as he was concerned, by the response the proposed publication had elicited from the political left and right. Unlike Kautsky's work which had blatantly catered to one viewpoint and had tried its best to serve that goal, Die Grosse Politik was attacked by the whole political spectrum.³⁸ The right feared embarrassing exposures of the old regime, and thus wanted the project suppressed, while the left demanded further evidence of Germany's guilt and feared the possibility of a whitewash at the hands of Thimme.

At the same time Thimme was Machiavellian enough in his own defense of the project, to go on the attack against the critics. By attaching the label Deutschfeindlich to any opponents of the work especially if they happened to come from the left, or if they were pacifists which was more dangerous yet in Thimme's estimation, he hoped to silence any detractors. The opprobrium of such a label was its greatest strength, because anyone who thus became a critic, automatically became identified with those who were out to undermine Germany's position abroad, and by implication they were either working for or with the allied interests. His earlier attack on Harden had already proven the effectiveness of this method. Similarly his sweeping indictment against Hermann Kantorowicz and his rejoinder to him, "Gedenke dass Du ein Deutscher bist!" was based on the premise

* It must be kept in mind that Thimme was making these observations before the respective British publication in 1926, British Documents on the Origin of the War (G. P. Gooch, Harold Temperly, eds., London 1926), and the French publication Documents Diplomatiques Francais (1871-1914) Commission de Publication des Documents Relatifs aux Origines de la Guerre de 1914, Paris 1929.

that anyone who disagreed was remiss in his duties as a German.³⁹

Kantorowicz had been a Kriegsfreiwilliger in 1914, yet at the end of the war had definitely moved into the pacifist camp, because he had lost faith in Germany's policies. In the course of his own analysis of the causes of the war, Kantorowicz became a persistent and well versed critic of men like Thimme who had set themselves the task to prove Germany's innocence, when in fact evidence seemed to indicate as far as Kantorowicz was concerned, that the central powers were primarily responsible.⁴⁰ However, he also wounded Thimme's pride by referring to the Grosse Politik as a Propagandamittel which was to be used to perpetuate the myth of Germany's encirclement before 1914 and it was possibly this accusation which Thimme resented most.⁴¹ Thimme's attack on Kantorowicz was of course exactly the result of his own failure to differentiate between historical objectivity and patriotic propaganda, a weakness he professed to detect in others.*

The very fact that the whole project had been commissioned by the Auswärtigen Amt and that the staff was paid out of the funds of the

* Herman Kantorowicz, Professor of Law at Freiburg University, had reached a different conclusion from the official view of the German government, when he reported to the Untersuchungsausschuss des Reichstags in August of 1923, which was investigating the war-guilt question. His report which was highly critical of Imperial German policy was never made public until 1967, when it was published under the title Gutachten zur Kriegsschuldfrage Imanuel Geiss, ed., (Frankfurt/Main 1967). Its conclusions foreshadowed Fritz Fischer's Griff nach der Weltmacht. Kantorowicz's 1929 publication Der Geist der Englischen Politik und das Gespenst der Einnkreisung Deutschlands, was a cautious statement on the same problem, but its conclusions were tempered by the knowledge that he was quickly becoming persona non grata among his own colleagues and German intellectuals on the whole. Since he was Jewish, Anglophile, Pacifist, Republican, Democrat and anti-Bismarck he suffered under a combination of severe handicaps in the later Weimar period, which ultimately led to his dismissal from the academic community. For a more complete examination of the "Fall Kantorowicz" see Erich Eyck, A History of the Weimar Republic, pp. 105-106.

Foreign Office tended to diminish Thimme's arguments for the complete independence of any sort and the "unabhängige Gelehrte" became a self-perpetuating myth.⁴² His further claim to "Wahrhaftigkeit, Sachlichkeit und Offenheit, die Fernhaltung jeder apologetischen nationalen oder sonstigen Tendenz, jeder Rücksichtnahme auf Personen, seien sie tot oder lebend," must also be taken with the proverbial grain of salt.⁴³ Certainly he was selective in what he considered Hofklatsch, justifying its deletion on the grounds that the inclusion of it would detract from the main argument. More to the point would have been an admission on his part that he felt the Kaiser needed protection and privacy, and that he, Thimme, would be the one who could provide this on an equitable basis. He was convinced that the documents would speak for themselves, provided of course that the right documents, in the right sequence were made available to the readers, and thus his job became more than a mere compiler of facts, but he also became an interpreter, especially for those unfamiliar with documentary material, who would be most in need of the Thimme touch, to throw light on an otherwise hidden subject.⁴⁴ Again, it must be emphasized that whatever the final judgement on such a policy, Thimme did not view it, or attempt it to be a deliberate manipulation of events, but rather a positive way to enhance the publication and thus felt himself morally justified in the steps he took. This is obvious from the vigorous way he defended himself and his position against any and all critics. The one concession he did admit to, was the fact that the series had been published in such a way as to make it easily assimilable for journalistic consumption, hence the public. He did not necessarily view this as a fault however, or a weakness, but rather as an enhancement, because it had after all, been

commissioned and directed for the express purpose to serve Germany and her people who were to be the final beneficiaries of it.⁴⁵

In the final analysis any shortcomings of the publication were due in Thimme's estimation, to the lack of time and the sheer volumnity of the task, a not unjustified claim, in view of the fact that they were under pressure to get the materials published as quickly as possible while being understaffed at the same time. It is therefore reasonable to accept his claim that some judicious cutting and selecting had to be done, and that someone had to do it and accept responsibility for it. Unless a speedy publication could be achieved the impact on Germany would be lost, since distance from events obviously diminished their importance and there would be little point in undertaking the task if it could not be used in some positive manner which would influence German policy vis-à-vis the allies. If the issue was left too long it would merely become an academic exercise, and Thimme was vitally concerned that it should be more than that since he had staked his reputation on it as well as devoting all his energies and time to it.⁴⁶

Long before the completion of the monumental work in the fall of 1926, the Aktenpublikation had become somewhat of an obsession with Thimme. It was not only the fact that he devoted himself to the task on a full-time basis, but it was to be the crowning achievement of his career, and thus any Kudos or criticisms of the work were received by him as comments upon his capacity as a historian. On the whole, he was justified in his evaluation of his own importance in the project. As the only qualified historian on the committee, the bulk of the editing, sorting, ordering and decision making as well as the explanatory

footnotes were left to him, consequently he saw it mostly as his creation.⁴⁷ Though one of the co-editors Johannes Lepsius, had died before ever becoming seriously involved in the project, the pre-occupation with the relative work loads of the three editors was to develop into a raging controversy over who had priority on the illustrious masthead of the publication, and Thimme was justifiably perturbed that he ranked on the bottom rung after having done the bulk of the work.⁴⁸ It was the extensive footnoting which took up the major portion of his time, because he tried to be as extensive as possible, providing every conceivable alternative, and examining a problem from every angle, ostensible to leave no doubt as to its correct interpretation. Of course, as mentioned earlier, it was precisely upon this point that some of the major criticism of the Aktenpublikation centered, because the footnoting was suspect, in that it could be interpreted as a deliberate attempt to encourage certain conclusions. After considerable reflection, even Thimme was forced to acknowledge that he may indeed have gone overboard in his attempts to provide clarification on some dubious issues.⁴⁹ However, he continued in his belief that these considerations were outweighed by the advantages that his extensive explanations offered to the uninitiated.⁵⁰ Certainly he would have agreed with the publishers statement on the series, who expounded it as " . . . ein Monumentalwerk, wie es in der Literatur keines Volkes auch nur im entferntesten Ähnlich existiert und wie es scheinbar auch niemals wiederholt werden wird."⁵¹ After all, this had been his own assessment from the beginning and its purpose had been to provide a weapon for the Republic so it could fight the "lie" of the German guilt, both within and without, whereas most of the

critics had offered little in the way of a positive contribution.

Though Die Grosse Politik took up most of his time, by his own admission, this did not prevent Thimme from pursuing tangent topics which fell within the larger topic of the Schuldthese. In his continuing search for the failures within, even the Kaiser did not escape his scrutiny. Whereas he had earlier defended the Emperor against all attacks, portraying him instead as a man moved by events rather than shaping them, and one who had tried his best against insurmountable odds, this adulation was to change temporarily at least in 1923. The occasion was an article by the American historian George Sylvester Viereck, entitled Eine Woche beim Kaiser, (A Week with the Kaiser) which was the result of an extensive interview granted to Viereck at Doorn, the Kaiser's retreat in Holland.⁵² * The interview had centered around the soon to be published volume of Kaiser Wilhelm II Erinnerungen und Gespräche, wherein the ex-Emperor set forth his ideas on various problems which had beset his regime. While Thimme had no quarrel with the Kaiser's attempt to voice his side of the complex arguments that surrounded his reign, he did object to the manner in which the Kaiser tried to divest himself of all responsibility for any events which had produced negative results during his term of power. Furthermore Thimme felt that the work should have been thoroughly edited (perhaps by him?) before being allowed into print and translation, in order to safeguard against providing evidence to those who were out to prove Germany's war-guilt.⁵³ Without editing the work as it was being presented to the public was full of self-praise "und

* Viereck was the son of the illegitimate off-spring of Wilhelm I.

alles andere Uebel", written by a Stimmungsmensch, who Thimme claimed, was caught in his own fantasies and self-suggestions. Seldom, Thimme continued, had there been a man so given to exaggeration and unwise thoughtless words, seldom he claimed, had he ever read, "ein so erstaunlich subjektives, nur auf Selbstrechtfertigung bedachtes, dabei von Irrtümern des Gedächtnisses (errors) erfülltes Memoirenwerk . . . wie das des Kaisers." Strong condemnatory words indeed from a kaisertreu subject, and certainly an aberration in Thimme's thinking, but an important one.⁵⁴ While few of the ex-Kaisers enemies would have disagreed with Thimme's evaluation, and many in all probability could have offered corroborating evidence to support it, the fact that a loyal subject could do the same, offered proof of the changes that had occurred since the war's end, and the change of attitudes that an emotional issue could bring about. Thimme, of course, failed to see any danger in his own attack upon the Kaiser, yet by his detailed analysis and his devastating condemnation of the latter's memoirs he gave far more support to the Emperor's opponents than they could have hoped for. The historical knowledge and intimate acquaintance of Thimme with many of the personalities of the former Reich, and his refutation of each and every claim the Emperor presented on his own behalf, glaringly illustrated the fallacies in the reminiscences and provided ample ammunition to those who were intent on maligning the Kaiser. It is doubtful if others, devoid of Thimme's historical background, and availability of historical resources, could have done such a thorough job. While his righteous wrath at the historical inaccuracies may be admired, it points out the dichotomy of his own position however. On the one hand, he was trying to remove the

onerous responsibility from Germany's shoulders, yet in the next stroke he was prepared to aid the enemies of the Republic for the sake of historical objectivity; - truly an effort worthy of Ranke. Thimme interpreted the Kaiser's failure to guard or to act against the increasing infringement of the military in the political sphere, as "ein Verbrechen gegen Deutschland", because he saw this non-intervention as the root cause that had led to the decay from within. Thimme however, went even further in his accusations, labelling the Kaiser as feige (cowardly) because he had evaded his responsibility as Oberster Feldherr, and instead of dying on the field of honor among his troops and sharing their fate, as he had exhorted them to do over the last four years, he had retreated to the safety of Holland.⁵⁵ *

Unpatriotic as these sentiments may have been, Thimme for perhaps the first time in his life, had come to grips with the real issues of why Germany had been involved in the war and why she had consequently lost it. He had clearly demonstrated the lack of leadership at the top, and though he failed to recognize it as such. In his analysis of the Kaiser's memoirs he had also unconsciously resolved his own moral dilemma. Five years of post-war activity had provided him

* Wilhelm Groener, who replaced Ludendorff as Quartiermeister in the last stages of the war used this same argument in his volume Lebenserinnerungen, Jugend, Generalstab, Weltkrieg (Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1957), "dass sich der Kaiser an die Front zu den kämpfenden Truppen in die Feuerlinie begeben solle. Wenn er dabei fiel oder verwundet wurde, so war das ein ehrenvolles Ende und machte den monarchischen Gedanken im Volk wieder stark.", p. 444. See also Dorothea Groener-Geyer, General Groener, Soldat und Staatsmann (Societäts Verlag, Frankfurt am Main 1955) "wenn der Monarch bereit war, sich selber einzusetzen, wie er es von jedem einzelnen Mann seines Heeres und von jedem Mitglied der Volksvertretung und der Regierung verlangt hatte.", p. 94.

with enough distance and hindsight to detach him from events and the guilt fixation. He had reached the point where he could publicly admit that there had indeed been something wrong with Germany and its monarchy, and that the Kaiser may have misled his Volk.

Ach der Kaiser war ja einst so gewiss, sein deutsches Volk herrlichen Zeiten entgegenzuführen! Und wohin sind wir schliesslich gekommen? Gekommen letzten Endes doch nicht durch die Niedertracht unserer Gegner, durch den 'Dolchstoss' in den Rücken unseres Heeres, . . . sondern (auch) durch ein Versagen des Kaisers selbst."⁵⁶

Perhaps Thimme mused, Wilhelm II should have followed the dictum of his ancestors, "In Gott und Schweigsamkeit setze ich meine Hoffnung und Zuversicht", thereby saving himself and Germany much embarrassment.⁵⁷

In his pursuit to arrive at some rationalization for Germany's war failures and all the subsequent dilemmas associated with it, Thimme collaborated in 1926 on a publication entitled Der Zusammenschluss, whose avowed aim it was to bring about an end to the Zwietracht in Germany. The editors Eduard Hemmerle and Friedrich Thimme stated in their opening remarks in the first issue, "Gelingen kann der Kampf des Deutschen Volkes um seine Weltgeltung nur, wenn in ihm selbst die grösste innere Geschlossenheit herrscht."⁵⁸ * The intent of the publication, of course, rested on the assumption that the myth of the innere Zwietracht was true and that there was indeed a widening rift between the political left and right, between workers and employers and among the confessions. It was also incumbent upon the reader to

* Ralf Dahrendorf in Gesellschaft und Demokratie in Deutschland (R. Piper & Co. Verlag, Munich 1956), examines the problem of German pre-occupation with "internal unity". He calls it the "verschworene Gesellschaft" against the enemies on the outside, which results in a sociological myth of internal strength, pp. 155-156.

accept the idea that internal dissension " . . . von je der Fluch Deutschlands gewesen ist", and the acceptance of this idea could then be used to explain past and present failures.⁵⁹

Using ex post facto logic Thimme could once again take refuge in his favourite refrain, blaming Versailles for the internal unrest, whereas earlier during the war, the unrest had led to Versailles. The Schuldthese and its accompanying problems was flexible enough to suit itself to every evil which had befallen Germany either during the war or after it. In Thimme's judgement only " . . . wenn der Verdammungsspruch des Versailler Frieden . . . , vor aller Welt als schnödes Unrecht anerkannt und dann von uns genommen wird", could Germany regain her rightful place among the nations and reassert her independence and self-respect.⁶⁰ Nevertheless this marked a perceptible mellowing in his attitude towards the Treaty. He was admitting in 1926 that his ideas of 1919 had been unwise and foolhardy, especially his recommendation of a total rejection of the Diktat of Versailles. As he realized now if this recommendation had been followed to its logical conclusions, total chaos would have resulted, as the Ruhr debacle had clearly demonstrated. His advice to the government of "besser ein Ende mit Schrecken, als ein Schrecken ohne Ende;" would have cost Germany her last vestiges of self-respect and any future claims to Weltgeltung, whereas now this lay once again within the realm of possibilities, as evidenced by her acceptance into the League of Nations in September 1926.⁶¹ Secondly, Thimme had become hopeful that acceptance into the League would precipitate a re-examination of the Treaty, especially Article 231. He was prepared at this stage to accept Mitschuld as long as the odium of "alleinige Kriegsschuld" would be lifted.⁶² He had thus

undergone a subtle but important transformation and rehabilitation from the ashes of 1918.

Unfortunately the great experiment of Der Zusammenschluss came to an early and ignominious end in the summer of 1928. The idealism which had presaged its inception had failed to materialize among those at whom the publication had been directed. Apathy and political strife continued to increase and plague the German scene, and the Schuldthese rather than providing a rallying point, became the very theme on which all controversy centered. Thimme's disappointment and bitterness are understandable to a degree, because essentially he had been working towards these same goals since his first public appeal for unity in 1916, in his article Vom inneren Frieden des deutschen Volkes. Most of his work since that time had centered around the same problem and associated topics. He summed up his disappointment in a lengthy statement which unconsciously had probably served as his modus operandi for the post-war period.

Mir persönlich war die resignierte Stimmung des deutschen Volkes schon in der ersten Hälfte des Weltkrieges augenfällig entgegengetreten, als ich den Versuch unternahm, durch ein gerade dem inneren Frieden des deutschen Volkes gewidmetes grosses Gemeinschaftsbuch den Geist des 4. August festzuhalten. Jetzt aber, wo unser unterliegen im Kriege und der Zusammenbruch des alten Staatswesens die Spaltung in unserem Volke noch vertiefte, wo gleichzeitig die Parteien und Fraktionen die an Stelle der Weimarer Verfassung für souverän erklärten Volkes die Herrschaft im Staatsleben usurpiert und so der unseligen Neigung der Deutschen zu Parteiung und Zersplitterung erst recht die Tür und Tor geöffnet haben, hat jene innere Resignation des deutschen Volkes sich fast schon zur Hoffnungslosigkeit und dumpfer Verzweiflung gesteigert. Das deutsche Volk seufzt und stöhnt unter dem Regiment der Parteien, in dem seine innere Uneinigkeit seinen sinnfälligsten Ausdruck gefunden hat. Es empört sich innerlich über diese Parteien und weiss nur noch nicht recht wie es sich

von ihnen befreien soll, glaubt auch nicht mehr an das Gelingen immer wieder neu angestellter Versuche, zu höheren Einheit zu gelangen.⁶³

Generally his disappointment focused on the center parties whose failure to respond to unity had led to a greater polarization, a fact he deplored and viewed with grave misgivings for the future. His analysis was also based on hindsight, and though he claimed to have been aware of this polarization during the first half of the war, he had nevertheless upheld the belief in the Burgfrieden until the end of it. In fact he was still using the same cliches which had rung so hollow in 1918, and could not accept the fact that the "spirit of the August days" had been nothing more than an expedient myth.

Thimme's optimism for the success of Der Zusammenschluss at its inception in 1926, had partly been the result of having just completed the Document publication. The last of volume of Die Grosse Politik was offered for public perusal in the fall of that year and Thimme was understandably pleased with the work. The optimism he had displayed six years earlier when the Foreign Office had first informed him of his appointment, had scarcely suffered in the intervening period.⁶⁴ To his vast relief and satisfaction he had proven what he had set out to do; offering documentary proof that Germany had not been solely responsible for the outbreak of the war in 1914. More importantly yet, he felt that he had conclusively demonstrated the same idea to a sceptical world. Yet on a grander scale he had failed. The work had been commissioned to give "der Aussenpolitik des Reiches ein brauchbares, stets bereites Werkzeug . . . das ausserhalb des Kampfes der Parteien steht und im Inlande, wie im Auslande den Ruf genießt: unabhängig und unbestechlich zu sein, und keinem anderen

Ziele zu dienen als dem Ziel, das nach einem Worte Walther Rathenaus; das Ziel der Erschliessung der deutschen amtlichen Archive gewesen ist: der Wahrheit zu dienen und niemanden sonst!"⁶⁵ Precisely because he had tried so valiantly to serve the Wahrheit, the publication took more than six years to complete, and in the process lost whatever usefulness it could have had for the Auswärtige Amt in the beginning. The initial expectation had been that the relevant documents could be put into manuscript form within four months. Undoubtedly the hurried publication of the Kautsky volumes led to this overly optimistic estimate. Since this proved to be impossible, in view of the extended time period that Thimme and his co-editors hoped to cover, the work became mostly an academic exercise as time progressed. Starting in 1871, meant that the very documents that had been uppermost in everyone's mind at the time of Versailles in 1919, in other words those dealing with the crisis of 1914, were the last to be published. When they finally did appear for public scrutiny, six years had put a different perspective on those events.

Retroactively of course the volumes did what the publisher claimed they would, " . . . das Werk, das entstand, hatte keine geringere Aufgabe, als den grauenhaften Paragraphen des Versailler Vertrages zu widerlegen; der Deutschland vor aller Welt entehrte und den Vorwand zu seiner Versklavung bot."⁶⁶ This may well have been so, but Germany had not stood still waiting for this refutation to come forth. Much had happened in the intervening period; the Ruhr had been invaded and abandoned; the country had experienced economic collapse and inflation; on the other hand Germany and Russia had reached a political agreement and now Germany had entered the League

of Nations, where her former enemies held court. The last fact was evidence enough that she had once again regained her place among the nations of the world. While none of this detracted from the validity of Thimme's work, his herculean effort however, had undergone a shift in emphasis. Whereas, in the beginning it was to have been an instrument of foreign policy, it had now become a work of purely historical value. Whereas, the initial expectation had been that it would serve as a direct and useful instrument to oppose and mitigate the effects of the Versailles Treaty, Thimme now had to face the realization that henceforth it could only serve as an example of historical research. Even his minor expectation that it would serve to discourage, or perhaps preclude future secret diplomacy came to naught. Germany herself was in the forefront of being once again involved in secret dealings with foreign powers, as her relations with Russia vis-à-vis her re-armament made perfectly clear.

Thus, it would have been reasonable to expect that Thimme would be less than satisfied at the end of 1926. Yet this was not the case. He had succeeded in some of his expectations. France, England, the United States and Austria had opened, or were in the process of opening, their archives, with varying degrees of frankness to public scrutiny, thereby fulfilling Thimme's prognosis that they would do so.⁶⁷ He had also succeeded in silencing most of the opposition to the project, both of the left and the right. First because of the obvious attempt at complete objectivity, and secondly because the documents had proven to be far less damaging to Germany than had at first been expected by the vested interests on all sides.

Ultimately of course, he had to wait for the complete triumph

along with the rest of his compatriots until 1936, when as he stated, "Erst jetzt indessen, nach feierlicher Zurücknahme dieses Schuldgeständnisses durch die Deutsche Reichsregierung ist der Augenblick gekommen wo die Schuldfrage, die mit der rein historischen Frage nach dem Ursprung des Krieges verquickt war, für sich keine Rolle mehr spielen sollte, und wo nur noch der völlig unbefangene Historiker das Wort zu führen hätte - im Dienste der Wahrheit."⁶⁸

Whatever successes he had achieved in sorting out the various liabilities, his research unfortunately only affirmed the fact that Germany had lost the war; not because of unfairness on the part of her opponents or because of dissent within, but because of internal ineptitudes. He had thus come full circle. The nagging question remained however, as to why Germany should have lost after holding the world at bay for four years? Thimme refused to accept the possibility of a military and economic defeat, the first example of a Materialschlacht. As late as 1937 he was still looking for the solution to the problem that had troubled him two decades earlier.⁶⁹ The one man whom he considered having come closer than anyone else, in offering a valid explanation for the failures of the war effort, was Oberst a.D. Bernhard Schwertfeger, who expounded his own thesis for the military failure in a volume entitled Das Weltkriegsende, Gedanken Über die deutsche Kriegsführung 1918. Schwertfeger laid the blame for the military failure squarely on the shoulders of the Kaiser. The lack of decisive leadership displayed by the Emperor during the war years, he felt had led to the emergence of a triumvirate, consisting of the Kaiser, the Chancellor and the Chief of the General Staff, and while each was to complement the other, each tried instead for absolute

control the result being a division of responsibility and effectiveness.⁷⁰ This highly simplified solution fit perfectly into Thimme's concept; it explained why Bethmann Hollweg was thwarted at every turn; it explained why the Kaiser lost control over events; and lastly it demonstrated the ascendancy of the military in the later stages of the war to the exclusion of the politicians. The military supremacy thus precluded a political settlement in 1918, when a military victory had become impossible.⁷¹ In the explanation put forth by Thimme therefore, the "stab in the back" had not been delivered by the left against the army, as in the conventional Dolchstoß legend, but rather by the military against the reigning politicians, and thus he could take comfort in the thought that Germany would have indeed remained invincible, if only . . . !⁷²

¹Karl Thimme, Mein Bruder Friedrich und ich, p. 32 (reference to letter of 7.1.1919, letter not extant).

²Ibid., p. 32. See also Thimme papers (unpublished letters 1914-1918) Friedrich Thimme to Wilhelm Thimme 6.10.1918. On his views on the Revolution see letter, Friedrich Thimme to Wilhelm Thimme 13.11.1918.

³Thimme papers (unpublished letters 1914-1918) Friedrich Thimme to Wilhelm Thimme 13.11.1918. See also Annelise Thimme, Delbrück, p. 146.

⁴Ibid., Friedrich Thimme to Wilhelm Thimme, 13.11.1918.

⁵Karl Thimme, Mein Bruder, p. 33. See also Thimme papers (unpublished letters 1919-1933) Friedrich Thimme to Wilhelm Thimme 10.1.1919. See also the numerous articles by Friedrich Thimme on the Social Democratic Party, which he had written during the war; "Die Socialdemokratie im neuen Deutschland" (1914) & (1915), "Gemeinsame Arbeit der Weg zum inneren Frieden" (1915), "Gegenseitiges Verstehen und Vertrauen" (1916), "Neuer Burgfrieden" (1917), "Deutsche Gemeinschaftsarbeit" (1917), "Würzburg" (1917), "Der Würzburger Parteitag" (1917), etc.

⁶Thimme papers (unpublished letters 1914-1918), Friedrich Thimme to Wilhelm Thimme, 13.11.1918; and (unpublished letters 1919-1933) Friedrich Thimme to Wilhelm Thimme 10.1.1919.

⁷Ibid., Friedrich Thimme to Wilhelm Thimme, 6.10.1918.

⁸Ibid., Friedrich Thimme to Karl Thimme 7.10.1918, also Friedrich Thimme to Wilhelm Thimme (beginning of November 1918).

⁹Friedrich Thimme, "Die Grosse Politik der Europäischen Kabinette 1871-1914, Persönliche Erinnerungen", Berliner Monatshefte, March 1937, p. 215.

¹⁰B. Uwe Weller, Maximilian Harden und die "Zukunft", (Schömann Universitätsverlag, Bremen 1970), pp. 47-48.

¹¹Friedrich Thimme, "Maximilian Harden am Pranger", Flugschrift der Neuen Woche, Nr. 1. Berlin 1919.

¹²Ibid., p. 1. See also Harry F. Young, Maximilian Harden, Censor Germaniae. (Martinus Nijhoff-The Hague 1959), p. 246.

¹³B. Uwe Weller, Harden, p. 265.

¹⁴Friedrich Thimme, "Erinnerungen", Berliner Monatshefte, p. 216.

¹⁵Friedrich Thimme, "Die Randbemerkungen des Kaisers", Deutsche Politik, January 2, 1920, Nr. 1, p. 11. Friedrich Thimme, "Die Aktenpublikation des Auswärtigen Amtes und ihre Gegner", Archiv für Politik und Geschichte, June/July 1924, Nr. 5/6, pp. 469-471. See also Friedrich Thimme, Im Dienste der Wahrheit (Arbeitsausschuss Deutscher Verbände, Berlin 1922), p. 30. See also George F. Hallgarten, Das Schicksal des Imperialismus im 20. Jahrhundert (Europäische Verlagsanstalt 1969) for a recent analysis of the Kautsky publications. Hallgarten on Thimme: "Thimme der Hauptherausgeber, ein typischer Vertreter des im Kaiserreich gross gewordenen Bürgertums, war hierbei im Einvernehmen mit der Leitung des Auswärtigen Amtes sehr bestrebt, heisse Eisen mit äusserster Behutsamkeit anzufassen." p. 85. Hallgarten reaches the conclusion that the attempt of clarification through the documents was nothing more than an attempt at rectification, rather than proof of the other sides guilt. An attempt by the Bürgertum to white-wash itself.

¹⁶Ibid., "Randbemerkungen", pp. 12-13.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 13.

¹⁸Friedrich Thimme, "Bethmann Hollweg - Betrachtungen zum Weltkrieg", Deutsche Politik, 27 June 1919, Nr. 26, p. 813.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 811.

²⁰Ibid., p. 813.

²¹Ibid., pp. 815-817.

²²Friedrich Thimme ed., Bethmann Hollwegs Kriegsreden (Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, Stuttgart und Berlin 1919), pp. 8-10. See also Friedrich Thimme, "Betrachtungen" Deutsche Politik, Nr. 26, p. 814, and the "Vorwort" by Friedrich Thimme to Kriegsreden.

²³Ibid., "Vorwort", p. X.

²⁴Ibid., pp. X-XI.

²⁵Ibid., p. XXV and p. XXX.

²⁶Ibid., p. LVIII.

²⁷Friedrich Thimme, "Zu Bethmann Hollwegs Gedächtnis", Deutsche Politik, 21 January 1921, Nr. 4, p. 81.

²⁸Ibid., p. 82.

²⁹Ibid., pp. 82-83.

³⁰Ibid., p. 85.

³¹Friedrich Thimme, "Bülow und Bethmann Hollweg" Deutsche Politik, 5 September 1919, Nr. 36, p. 295.

³²Ibid., p. 296.

³³For a more detailed account of the attacks directed against Bethmann, and the defence offered, see Eberhard v. Vietsch, Bethmann Hollweg (Harald Verlag, Boppard am Rhein 1969), pp. 297-298.

³⁴Friedrich Thimme, "Erinnerungen" Berliner Monatshefte, pp. 216-219. See also Friedrich Thimme, "Die Aktenpublikation . . . ihre Gegner" Archiv für Politik und Geschichte, Nr. 5/6, p. 471.

³⁵Friedrich Thimme, "Die Oeffnung der europäischen Geheimearchive - das deutsche Beispiel", Berliner Tageblatt und Handels Zeitung, Tuesday, 13 June 1922.

³⁶Friedrich Thimme, "Erinnerungen" Berliner Monatshefte, p. 219.

³⁷Friedrich Thimme, "Die Aktenpublikation des Auswärtigen Amtes - Beiträge zu ihrer Entstehungsgeschichte" Einzelschrift zur Politik und Geschichte (Berlin 1924), p. 8 and p. 17.

³⁸Ibid., pp. 34-35. See also Friedrich Thimme, "Die Aktenpublikation . . . ihre Gegner" Archiv für Politik und Geschichte, Nr. 5/6, pp. 470-471.

³⁹Ibid., p. 53 and "Die Aktenpublikation . . . ihre Gegner" which deals with the opposition to the project by prominent individuals, among them Hermann Kantorowicz and Reichstag Deputy, Dr. Gildemeister, pp. 472-492 inclusive.

⁴⁰Hermann Kantorowicz, Gutachten zur Kriegsschuldfrage 1914, (Introduction by Imanuel Geiss), (Wuropäische Verlagsanstalt 1967), p. 31.

⁴¹Hermann Kantorowicz, Der Geist der Englischen Politik und das Gespenst der Einkreisung Deutschlands (Ernst Rowohlt Verlag, Berlin 1929), p. 454.

⁴²Friedrich Thimme, Im Dienste, p. 24.

⁴³Ibid., pp. 24-25.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 25.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 28.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 32.

⁴⁷Bernhard Schwertfeger, "Der Abschluss des Grossen Aktenwerkes" Archiv für Politik und Geschichte, "Die Grosse Politik der Europäischen Kabinette 1871-1914" (Berlin, January 1927), p. 22. See also Friedrich Thimme, "Erinnerungen", pp. 219-222.

⁴⁸The controversy as to who should get top billing on the final publication, occupies a lengthy and voluminous file. It was to result in a bitter controversy between Thimme and Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, the end result being that the two ceased communications. The whole controversy is laid out in the Schuldreferat file 61/186, Microfilm roll 3410, from frames E 616805 to # 617002 inclusive - Publication of the National Archives of the United States of America, at Alexandria, Va.

The bitterness of the dispute is all the more astonishing, after the editors earlier pronouncement, that this would be a "labour of love", to be done entirely devoid of any personal glory or benefit, but simply to serve the fatherland. The argument ended in defeat for Thimme, since his name was never put at the top of the illustrious masthead; a fact he never forgot or forgave.

⁴⁹Friedrich Thimme, "Die Grosse Politik der Europäischen Kabinette 1871-1914", Berliner Monatshefte, March 1937, p. 222.

⁵⁰Friedrich Thimme, Im Dienste, p. 4.

⁵¹Hans Moeller, "Geleitwort des Verlages" Archiv für Politik und Geschichte, "Die Grosse Politik der Europäischen Kabinette 1871-1914" (Berlin, January 1927), (no pages in text).

⁵²Friedrich Thimme, "Kaiser Wilhelm II Erinnerungen und Gespräche: Article #1, Kölnische Zeitung, Saturday, January 6, 1923, Nr. 14.

⁵³Ibid., no page.

⁵⁴Ibid., no page.

⁵⁵Ibid., Article #2, Sunday, January 7, 1923, Nr. 15a.

⁵⁶Ibid., Article #4, Wednesday, January 10, 1923, #21 (italics mine). In all fairness it must be pointed out that Thimme wrote a laudatory article on the Kaiser, the occasion being the latter's 75th birthday. See Friedrich Thimme, "Kaiser Wilhelm als Politiker" Monarchie - Zeitschrift für deutsche Tradition, January 1934. The article hardly represents a balanced picture, but it may be excused on the grounds that the Emperor was now an old man, and the issues which had waxed large in everyone's mind a decade earlier had now become academic. The government that was shaping Germany's future in 1934, had also "morally" rejected the hated Treaty, and had won Thimme's approval for this action, p. 2. Officially the rejection occurred on

March 16, 1935, see E. H. Carr, International Relations between the two World Wars (London 1965), for further details, p. 217.

In praise of the Kaiser see also Dr. Kurt Jagow's article in the same issue of Monarchie, "Die Kriegsschuld des Kaisers", wherein Wilhelm II is portrayed as a Friedenskaiser of twenty-five years duration, pp. 6-8.

In 1929 Thimme was chosen as editor of the Monatsschrift Hohenzollern, a monarchical publication, whose avowed aim was the re-establishment of the monarchy. Obviously Thimme still qualified as a Verfechter of the monarchical ideals. See letter from Cott'sche Buchhandlung, January 18, 1929, which analyses Thimme's political orientation through a well summarized account of his public utterings and writings on the monarchical problem. In order to secure the editorial post, Thimme had written an unpublished article which can only be described as a hymn to the Kaiser. (See Abschrift).

⁵⁷Ibid., no page.

⁵⁸Friedrich Thimme, Eduard Hemmerle, eds., Der Zusammenschluss (Verlag Hans Scheller G.M.B.H., Berlin), April 1926, Nr. 1, p. 1.

⁵⁹Ibid., pp. 1-3.

⁶⁰Ibid., Friedrich Thimme, "Zur Einführung", p. 6.

⁶¹Ibid., Friedrich Thimme, "Der Sinn der deutschen Weltgeltung", Heft 2, May 1926, pp. 7-8. Friedrich Thimme, "Der Zusammenschluss als europäisches Problem", Heft 3/4, June/July 1926, p. 2.

⁶²Ibid., Friedrich Thimme, "Weltgeltung", Heft 2, pp. 10-11.

⁶³Ibid., Friedrich Thimme, "Stirb und werde", Heft 3 (last issue) July 1928, pp. 114-115, (*italics mine*).

⁶⁴Friedrich Thimme, "Erinnerungen", Berliner Monatshefte, p. 215.

⁶⁵Hans Moeller, "Geleitwort des Verlages", Archiv für Politik und Geschichte, (no pages).

⁶⁶Ibid., no pages.

⁶⁷Friedrich Thimme, "Erinnerungen", Berliner Monatshefte, pp. 220-221.

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 223.

⁶⁹Friedrich Thimme, "Der Weltkrieg und sein Ende" Weisse Blätter, Karl Ludwig zu Guttenberg ed. (Monatsschrift für Geschichte, Tradition und Staat) June 1935, p. 258. See also Hans Herzfeld "Zur Deutschen Politik im Ersten Weltkrieg - Kontinuität oder permanente Krise?", Historische Zeitschrift, Vol. 191, (Munich 1960). Herzfeld quotes Admiral von Müllers volume, Regierte der Kaiser, wherein the latter also lays the blame for 1918 at the feet of the Emperor, "Noch niemals ist ein so gutes Volk so schlecht geführt worden", pp. 72-73.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 259.

⁷¹Ibid., pp. 263-265.

⁷²For similar comments and conclusions, see Hans Delbrück, Vor und nach dem Weltkrieg - Politische und historische Aufsätze, (Otto Stollberg & Co. Verlag für Politik und Wirtschaft, Berlin 1926). Herein Delbrück indulges in the same myths and mea culpas as Thimme, pp. 406-434.

CONCLUSION

. . . wie kam es, dass wir, die wir mit unseren Verbündeten vier Jahre hindurch dem Ansturm der ganzen Welt siegreich standgehalten hatten, schliesslich doch unterlegen sind?

(Friedrich Thimme 1937)

The search for truth by Thimme and his peers, was more than an attempt to arrive at historical objectivity. It was an attempt to rationalize the defeat of a nation, and to rationalize their acceptance of the post-war era. With the completion of the Document publication, a major phase in his life had come to its conclusion. Germany, as he had conclusively proven had not been guilty of deliberate aggression, as the allied claims put forth at Versailles. Thimme could thus rest his case.

Yet he knew that more than the simple problem of guilt was involved in this proof. The world remained skeptical at Germany's demonstrations of her innocence, and Weimar, the successor to the Reich, had not benefitted by it. Furthermore he had failed to resolve the major dilemma that still beset his generation; how to equate moral victory with military defeat. Though he could point to the evidence which exonerated Germany, he still refused to accept the fact that the war had been lost in spite of this. To a large degree of course, this dilemma was of his own making. To the victors of 1918, Germany's guilt was a direct result of her pre-1914 policy. To Thimme on the other hand, the problem of moral guilt and the causes which led to the war were not different sides of the same coin, but different coins. The problem of guilt to him was a direct result of defeat. Without

defeat there would have been no Versailles, and therefore the search concentrated on those who had brought about defeat. In this he was joined by many, of all stratas of society and all intellectual levels. Each had his own personal explanation, and all of them sought to explain why Germany lost the war, while few looked for the causes of the conflict. Those who did, sought to provide evidence of their nation's innocence, rather than to portray her involvement. They searched for exoneration, not responsibility; they sought to find evidence of the other sides' guilt, rather than their own. Those who looked for the causes within, as Thimme did to a large degree, found themselves faced with the realities of a Republic. Weimar was the child of Versailles and to accept Weimar meant to accept Versailles, and thus Thimme became a Vernunftsrepublikaner who acknowledged the Republic as the legitimate successor to the Monarchy. Yet as an avowed monarchist this also meant that he had to accept the Monarchy's failure, which ran counter to his historical training. Raised in the tradition of the "Wars of Liberation", he still viewed the 19th Century as the guidepost for German development, whose zenith had been 1870-71, and there could thus be no turning back. To accept that the Germany of post-1918, was less than before, was to accept a Germany of diminishing importance, yet one hundred years of tradition pointed to the contrary. Thimme was thus defending the past, while being engaged in the process of justifying the present. Weimar needed justification to ensure its success, but to accomplish this at the expense of the past ran counter to his beliefs. He shared this moral dilemma with the generation of historians that had participated in World War I as observers. They represented not the beginning but the end of a historical school. They had

been raised and nurtured on a diet of Befreiungskriege; to them 1914 was the culmination of the political and national aspirations which had their origins in 1813. Thimme and his peers were the end product of a century of German military ascendancy which by its very success had created its own weakness. There existed in 1914 the firm conviction that German military might was indeed invincible; as evidence there was Leipzig, Waterloo, Königgrätz and Sedan. A hundred years of success had not imbued the post-1871 generation with a sense of humility, and thus another explanation had to be found for 1918. The enemy had refused to die, despite his mortal wounds, and since the answer for the defeat was not to be found on the battlefields, the solution had to lie within. Their longing for "Die Gute Alte Zeit" was more than a cliché, it was a cry for understanding, an appeal for help, born of defeat. To them it was incomprehensible that one hundred years of success should be capped by failure; that one hundred years of growth should result in stunting; that one hundred years of "Germanic" culture should be superseded by lesser ideals. The post-1918 era was not a successor to the Wilhelminische Zeitalter, in the eyes of Thimme and his peers, rather they saw it as an alien appendage that had to be operated on. It was a Fremdkörper within what they still construed to be an essentially healthy body, a mere quirk of fate, a temporary misalignment of history. It was in the scheme of these events that the Schuldthese took on its vast significance, because it served as the focus of the generation, it became the explanation and the solution, it served as a crutch and as a rallying point, as a yardstick and as a measure of failure, but most of all it served as an escape from reality; and thus as late as 1937, Thimme could still

ask, "Why did we lose?" - rather than "Why did we fight?" - the problem remained unsolved.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

The sources for this study were largely derived from the personal papers of Professor Annelise Thimme. Foremost among these are the numerous unpublished letters of Friedrich Thimme to his parents, his brothers and sisters, his wife, and various political and academic acquaintances. In some instances there are duplicates to the letters in the various Nachlässe of the individuals involved as for example Friedrich Meinecke and Hans Delbrück, which can be found in the Archives at Berlin and Koblenz. There is also in existence a Thimme Nachlass, at Koblenz which contains duplicates to some of the material in Professor Thimme's possession, but it is by no means complete and does not include correspondence to his family. There are two unpublished manuscripts, by Karl Thimme and Wilhelm Thimme which offer an excellent if brief account of the life of Friedrich Thimme as seen through the eyes of his brothers.

An extensive, though incomplete list of Friedrich Thimme's publications, may be found in Dietrich's Zeitschriftenbibliographie, which contains well in excess of two hundred titles, without including many newspaper articles, and contributions to various books he edited. His editorship of Die Grosse Politik der Europäischen Kabinette 1871-1914, need hardly be mentioned, the immensity of the task speaks for itself and for Friedrich Thimme's prolific scholarship.

In view of the fact that much of the material used in this study will be unavailable to the reader, the author has taken the liberty of including explanatory notes at the foot of various pages which are offered as a guide to relevant works dealing with similar problems, and which are readily available.

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